

the aftermath is secondary

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the aftermath is secondary

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Summary

Tommy is twelve, not stupid. He's played zombie video games before; the ones rated M for mature, the ones rated for teens older than him-- yes, he knows, his mum would be upset if she knew what he'd been playing. But maybe it wasn't all for the worst, since apparently they're now living that reality.

(Zombie APOC AU, with a focus on Tommy & Tubbo. A side story from my main fic, which can be found in the series! It's not required to read that first, but I recommend it for some bits of context :])

what goes up

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tubbo is shaking.

Tommy's not quite sure what to do.

Look. He's twelve, not stupid. He's played zombie video games before; the ones rated M for mature, the ones rated for teens older than him-- yes, he knows, his mum would be upset if she knew what he'd been playing. But maybe it wasn't all for the worst, since apparently they're now living that reality.

Upstairs, from the street, he can hear screaming. It makes him want to curl up and put his hands over his ears, pretend he can't hear it all. Block it out. But he can't, because Tubbo is shaking and crying and bleeding on his shoulder where some lady with whited-out eyes and the smell of rot on her breath had torn at his shirt and arm.

"Tommy," he whispers through the tears, voice choked up with snot and phlegm, cracking a little. "Tommy, you need to go."

"Not leaving you, Big T," Tommy insists for the hundredth time. They're twelve. They're not stupid. Anyone who's played a round of COD: Zombies or watched World War Z can tell you what a zombie bite means. Tommy forces himself to think it: Tubbo is going to die.

Tommy will follow him there, unquestionably.

"I miss my mom," Tubbo tells him, head leaning against Tommy's shoulder and hand gripping his injured shoulder. Tommy had ripped part of his shirt from the bottom to messily wrap around it, but that was the extent of his medical abilities. He thinks about his own mom-- bright eyes, a loud laugh that Tommy had inherited, long pretty hair.

"Me too," he says, leaning his own head onto Tubbo's, shutting his eyes.

Somewhere upstairs, a TV cuts into static.

Tommy wakes up, and at first, he thinks he's dead.

It would make sense, after all. Tubbo would've turned while he was asleep, and then bitten Tommy, who would've slept through the bite because he sleeps like the dead anyways. It would be preferable to knowing he was dying, after all. He keeps his eyes shut and breathes,

feeling his chest move up and down. Who knew you still needed to breathe after dying? He quietly takes stock of his body-- his toes are cold, his fingers are stiff. His shoulder and right side are warm with the body heat coming from pressure against him. His shoulder is maybe a bit damp, as well.

Ah. There's the bite.

Tommy opens his eyes.

The basement is staring back at him. It's Tubbo's house, so it's clean but dark. They hadn't bothered to hit the lights before bolting down here, locking the door behind them and frantically screaming at each other as the adrenaline wore off. After that, they'd just been quiet in their acceptance. He'd been so exhausted after running to get to Tubbo's house, dodging weirdos on the street-- no, zombies. Dead people, who had spat and clicked and screamed at him. The warm weight on his shoulder shuffles slightly, and Tommy inhales. He turns his head, fully expecting to see Tubbo, decayed holes in his face, teeth bared, eyes blank--

But all that's there is Tubbo. Normal Tubbo, with a healthy red to his cheeks and sleep crusting in the corners of his eyes, dried tears tracking down his cheeks. There's blood smeared on his lax hands, like fingerpaint. Tommy's shoulder isn't wet with blood-- it's spit.

"Ew," he says before he can stop himself, and then Tubbo's blinking open his eyes and looking at him. They're normal. Same as always. Tommy stares and Tubbo stares right back.

"...are we dead?" Tubbo finally asks, cheek smushed up against Tommy's shoulder still and words distorted. He sounds like a dork. Tommy glances around the dark basement, then back at Tubbo. In the ambient light from the tiny window in the corner, he can sort of see him. Yellow light. Streetlamps.

"Dunno," he says. Then flinches, as a sharp pain echoes in his leg. "Ow! What the hell?"

"Probably not dead," Tubbo says, sitting up slightly and pulling his hand back from where he'd pinched Tommy's bare calf. He winces, grimacing as his shoulder probably twinges. It still looks bloody. "Ow. Definitely not."

"I refuse to believe heaven is in your basement," Tommy snipes back, shuffling forward a little bit and listening. There's no more screaming from upstairs, and when he creeps towards the door he can't see any light emitting from the bottom. It's most likely night out, he reckons.

"Tommy," Tubbo says from behind him. Then again when Tommy ignores him: "Tommy!"

"What?" He hisses, turning back around and slowly shuffling over. "I was just looking."

"My arm hurts," Tubbo complains, and they both spare it a glance. The blood has seeped through the fabric of Tommy's shirt, staining it a dusky red, and even down Tubbo's shirt a little. "Should we look at it?" He asks, sounding hesitant. Tommy grimaces, then reaches out and slowly undoes the hasty knot he'd tied the day before.

The wound is nasty. Both boys suck in air when it's revealed to air-- one out of sympathy, one out of pain.

"Owww," Tubbo whines, throwing his head back and squeezing his eyes shut.

"Gross," Tommy says, leaning in for a closer look. It's a human bite mark, teeth clearly visible and some of the skin ripped. He wrinkles his nose, leaning back, and then glancing around the basement.

"We need to get bandages," Tubbo says quietly, eyes still shut. "I'm not a monster yet. Maybe I won't turn into one."

"Is there anything down here?" Tommy asks, already moving to get up and look. He rummages through shelves, careful not to knock into anything in the dark. "I know your dad keeps tools down here-- oh, shit, nice." Something smooth and cool is in his grip, and when he holds it up he can make out its shape. A hammer, which he holds at his side as he rummages more.

"I don't think so," Tubbo says, shivering slightly. "Mum keeps the medicine in our bathroom. It's just dad's stuff down here."

Tommy glances over towards the stairs, and the basement door. Tubbo must think of the same thing at the same time, because he cuts Tommy off before he can even speak. "No!" He whisper-shouts, shuffling forward a bit. "Tommy, there's gonna be people up there. Dead ones."

Tommy does not think of his own mother, who had shoved him out of her bedroom before screaming through the door for him to run to Tubbo's house.

"I have to," he says. "You need the bandaids. We need food. Your mum and Lani and Teagan were out, right? Shopping? Where'd your dad go?"

"He went to go find them," Tubbo says, and it's clear he's shaking. "He--"

"Okay," Tommy says, cutting him off before anything else can be said. "So I go up and get the bandages and food, and we wait down here for them to get back. We'll ride it out."

"Tommy!" Something about the way Tubbo says the word-- like he's about to cry again, on the verge of tears, makes Tommy turn from where he'd been studying the basement stairs. And no surprise, Tubbo looks to be on the verge of crying. He holds a hand out, fingers shivering. "Please don't leave me," he begs, and Tommy swallows.

"I'll be right back," he promises, reaching out and tapping Tubbo's fingers with his own, then heading up the stairs with care not to let any of them creak.

The hammer in his fingers is cold and heavy, and he grips it tight.

Pressing his ear to the wood of the door, he can't hear anything of note. Only the sound of Tubbo sniffing underneath him, and the occasional shuffle when he moves. Tommy's had a

lot of practice playing hide and seek, especially in the dark during sleepovers, so he figures this is just that.

The only problem is, if he gets caught, he's probably dead.

But now's not the time to think about that, he rationalizes, gently unlocking the door to the basement and silently turning the handle. It opens slowly, and he takes a step out into the carpeted hallway and lets it close behind him.

It's very dark.

The kitchen light is on, at least, at the end of the hallway. It's yellow glow spills out against the carpet, but Tommy doesn't go there just yet. Instead, he creeps the other way, farther into the dark. He presses himself against a wall, holds his breath, and peeks around the corner. The front door is wide open, left from where he'd come in before in such a rush, dragging a bleeding and terrified Tubbo behind him. Outside, he can see dark lumps on the ground, and something shuffling across the street, limping and inhuman.

He holds his breath, and steps out into the foyer.

Be brave, he thinks, his mum's voice echoing in his head. *It's just a little fright. No need to let it keep you up at night.*

The front door knob is cool metal under his fingers, and with a gentle nudge, it closes.

Nothing jumps his way from the street, and with shaking hands, he locks and bolts the front door.

It's something, but he's still tense. Anything could have come into the house while they were in the basement, asleep. Tommy's stupid and rash and impulsive, but right now Tubbo is hurt and he is also selfless and he knows he needs to keep himself alive if Tubbo is going to live.

He heads up the stairs, instinctively avoiding the creaky ones. Hammer ready to strike at any moment, he pretends it's a video game.

Avoid the creaking floorboards. Press against the wall. Keep an eye out. Teagan's door is closed, but Lani's is open and so is Tubbo's. They share a bathroom, the one with the bandaids. Down the hall, the door to Tubbo's parent's room is also half-open. He keeps his eyes open as he tips his head into Tubbo's room.

It seems so normal, he thinks, stepping over the pile of dirty clothes on the floor and scooping up Tubbo's school backpack. He dumps the papers and pencils and crumbs out onto the bed sheets, shaking it out with the soft clink of zippers and keychains. It'll have to do, he thinks, heading toward the bathroom with no small amount of determination.

Once in the bathroom, he locks himself in. It's safer, he thinks, allowing himself to breathe and relax as he digs through the cabinet and then under the sink. The medkit has a big red cross on it, and he opens it only for a moment before snapping the plastic closed again and

shoving it away into the backpack. From there he inspects the cabinets, tugging anything that looks remotely helpful out and scooping it all into the bag.

“I feel like a drug dealer,” he mutters to no one in particular. “Shady.” The bag rattles a little as he zips it up, slinging it onto his shoulder and then picking up the hammer again from where he had laid it on the counter in order to look for the bandages.

Tommy presses his ear to the door of Tubbo’s room again, quiet, holding his breath. It swells in his chest as he listens, slight discomfort growing as he strains to listen for any movement in the house or room.

He hears nothing, so after a second he unlocks the bathroom door and slips out into Tubbo’s dark room again. He takes a minute to peer out the window, but all he sees is the backyard and house behind them. None of it’s lights are on, and beyond it the town seems to be quiet. It’s... disturbing. Everything is so quiet, he thinks, backing away from the window and then heading downstairs once more.

This time, his destination is the kitchen and it’s yellow light. Fairly certain that they’re alone in the house, Tommy allows himself to move quicker this time down the stairs. Confidence growing, he slips down the carpet-covered hallway and past the basement door again. He checks around the corner, then slips into the kitchen.

First, the pantry. He kneels in front of the open door, tugging open the backpack and dumping whatever first comes to mind into it. Snack packs, granola bars, small bags of cheese crackers, some cookies. Bread, peanut butter. Next, the fridge. He opens it and scours it for anything useful-- water bottles sit in the bottom rack, so he tugs those out and dumps them into the bag as well. It’s getting full and heavy, so after a moment of consideration he dumps some jam in there as well.

Behind him, a floorboard creaks.

Tommy freezes.

Slowly, with care, his fingers find the handle of the hammer he’d let sit on the floor while he packed food away into the bag. He’s shaking, and there’s a clicking noise behind him.

He turns.

“Oh, shit, fucking hell,” he swears, staring at the dog in front of him. Her tail wags, and Tommy lets himself come down off the heart attack. “Betty, what the fuck,” he hisses, towards her, reaching out with one shaking hand. Her nails click against the tile of the kitchen, and she licks his hand gently before turning in a circle, wandering. Tommy moves to shut the fridge and zip up the backpack, glancing once more around the kitchen and then back at his dog. “Where’s Walter?” He asks her, of course not expecting a response. He doesn’t get one, of course, since she’s a fucking dog.

After a moment, he hoists the bag on. “Right,” he says. “I bet you followed me. Who knows what else did. Come on, Bets.”

She does. Tail tucked between her legs, Betty follows as Tommy creeps back to the basement door and lets himself in, locking the door behind him and ushering her down the stairs.

Tubbo's still sitting in the corner where he'd left him, shivering slightly, eyes tuned to the stairs. There's panic as he sees Betty, but it's quickly replaced by delight when he sees her and laughs a little, quiet. Tommy doesn't miss the way his eyes jump around, obviously checking to make sure Tommy's okay. He doesn't say a word about it, though.

"How'd she get here?" Tubbo asks, a little breathless as Tommy plops down on his knees beside him and starts emptying the bag.

"Dunno," Tommy says. "I probably left the door open when I ran over. She's such a scaredy-cat, she prolly followed and hid in the kitchen." Finally, he reaches the medkit, which had been stuffed into the bottom of the bag by the time he'd gotten to the basement again. He tugs it out, the plastic latch failing and it spilling open just a second later. "Shit!"

"Did you see anything?" Tubbo asks, reaching out with dried-bloody fingers to help him pick up the stuff, moving very gingerly. Tommy risks a glance at his shoulder again-- the bite still seems to be oozing blood, but it doesn't look like it's getting Tubbo sick or anything. Maybe it's a case-by-case basis?

"No," he lies, thinking about the dark lumps in the streets that were definitely not alive. He shoves a pair of gloves back into the first aid kit.

"Oh." Tubbo stares down at the mess they'd shoved back into the plastic, then gently takes out a square of gauze. "I-- I think I need some water."

They keep their voices down as they discuss and argue over how to bandage a wound-- Tommy thinks some steps are unnecessary, and Tubbo's just wasting their supplies. But Tubbo bites back with the fact that everything is going to be fine and he doubts they're going to be here longer than a few more hours.

"Besides," he says quietly, as Tommy finishes tying a messy knot out of more fabric he'd ripped off of his shirt sleeve to hold the gauze in place over Tubbo's shoulder. They'd washed the blood off of him and cleaned it as best they could, but it's still not the best medical work ever. "My dad'll come back with my mum. It's just night now. They're probably laying low."

Tommy's lied to Tubbo before. He'll do it again. "Probably," he says, standing up and shuffling around in boxes until he finds the ones with all the old sheets and blankets in them. He doesn't hesitate to throw one over Tubbo's head. They both snigger, settling down against each other just like they had before. Betty joins them in a second, having been following Tommy around for the most part and sniffing at the bloody mess they'd shoved into the garbage can in the corner of the room.

Betty's there. Tommy's got a hammer in his lap this time, too, and Tubbo's not crying about his imminent death, so. It's marginally better. Plus, blankets.

"It's like a sleepover," Tubbo whispers a few minutes into the silence. Tommy snorts.

“Right,” he says, but despite his usual outpouring of conversation topics, he finds he has nothing to say. His fingers are still shaking against the cool wood handle of the hammer, and he doesn’t even bother to hide it. Tubbo hums against his shoulder, then quietly rearranges the blanket a little bit.

“Night, Tommy.”

“Night, shitass.”

Tommy doesn’t really sleep.

Tubbo does. He falls asleep only a little after they exchange goodnights, and from there it’s just Tommy and his thoughts. He watches the stairs and door to the basement, eyes flicking between that to Tubbo and occasionally, the hammer in his hands. Betty is there as well, curled up and leaning against his legs. He’s warm, but it’s almost suffocating. He doesn’t dare move away from them both. The discomfort grounds him, keeps him awake. It’s needed.

Eventually, though, his eyes do get a bit heavy. He rests them from time to time, dropping off and then waking back up in fits of paranoia and fear. Again and again he can hear his mum’s voice-- *RUN, TOMMY* -- and see the shuffling of the people who were already sick in the street. He’ll jerk awake, jostling Tubbo, shaking Betty, and yet both of them doze on. At some point the sun rises. Tommy doesn’t bother shaking Tubbo awake when it does. He figures Tubbo will wake up on his own and see what Tommy’s been seeing this whole time-- they’re alone. No one is coming back for them, even if they wanted to. They’re stuck in this stupid basement, and they’re alone.

Tommy is twelve and big and strong and he does *not* cry himself to sleep during the early morning hours.

He does sleep, however. Eventually, his restless dozing manages to drift off into something more substantial, and he sleeps for a bit. It’s not long, though. Never long-- he’s pulled into the waking world by the sound of wrappers crinkling and Tubbo laughing quietly. For a second he’s confused-- Tubbo’s by his side, isn’t he? But then he wakes up more and realizes his side is cold, the blankets are cushioning him gently, and Betty is also gone.

He shifts, and Tubbo’s laughter quiets a little more. “Hey, Tommy,” he says gently. There’s more crinkling. “Hungry?”

He’s not, but he accepts the granola bar given to him without question. Tubbo munches on a bag of cheese crackers, staring at Betty and occasionally giving her one as well.

“I think she likes these,” Tubbo says after one particularly crunchy cracker. Tommy has been busy staring at the stairwell and waiting for the door to crash inwards, for monsters to spill

down the steps and tear them limb from limb. He jolts slightly, glancing over and grinning despite not feeling like smiling at all.

“Probably hungry,” he says, and thinks of the dog food in their kitchen at his house. He doesn’t think he can go back.

The day passes in relative silence. Tubbo talks a lot, which isn’t unusual. But Tommy’s shaken, and it shows. He knows it shows, based on how Tubbo babies him a little and insists on feeding him and looking at a scrape he’d gotten the day prior on something or other-- maybe a door, maybe the pavement. He can’t recall from the blur that had been their panic and fear. Most of the day is actually gone, by now. He can still see his mother, though, arms outstretched and panic written clear as day over her face.

RUN, TOMMY!

Tommy lets Tubbo baby him. The day turns into afternoon, then evening. Outside, there are the occasional screaming noises that make both of them flinch, and Tubbo carefully lines up everything Tommy had grabbed and counts it, over and over. It’s annoying, but Tommy bites his tongue and lets him do it. By the time the sun goes down and the basement is dark again, Tubbo’s also lost the spunk that he’d carried with him throughout the day.

They’re back in the corner again, sitting with blankets tucked up to their chins and Betty at Tubbo’s side. Probably begging for food at first, but now she’s just asleep. Tommy pets her quietly as they lie there, both of them flinching as a car alarm sounds somewhere in the distance, sudden and monotone.

“They’re not coming back, are they?” Tubbo asks into the dark. Tommy thinks about his mother.

“No,” he says quietly. “I don’t think so.”

“Oh,” Tubbo says. “Okay.”

He bursts into tears.

Tubbo’s always been the quiet kind of crier. Lots of tears and snot and gross stuff, but no sobs. Nothing loud. Just the quiet kind of sadness that comes from being a quiet kind of kid, at least around people he didn’t know too well. Tommy can tell just from the shake of his shoulders he’s crying, much less the wet spot steadily growing larger on his shoulder. His shirt is getting really fucking disgusting at this point, but he can’t bring himself to care, really.

He doesn’t cry.

“What are we going to do?” Tubbo asks later, once his tears have somewhat subsided into just drips, not full-blown faucet action. He sounds clogged up, and a little pained. Tommy should’ve had him take another painkiller before they settled in to sleep, he thinks. But it’s too late now-- they’re entrenched in tears and blankets and neither of them want to get up. The despair is too heavy, too crushing.

“I don’t know,” Tommy whispers quietly. “I have no fucking idea.” In reality, he has lots of ideas. Most of them end in terrible death for at least one of them, and others are akin to scenes he’d seen in video games or movies. At least one has this all being a bad dream.

“We can’t stay here forever,” Tubbo points out, voice muffled for various reasons. The most recent being the blanket he’s currently tugged up to his face to use to wipe at his wet cheeks. “We won’t have food after a little bit. Or anyone else. Oh my god what if we’re the last people alive--”

“That’s impossible,” Tommy reasons, running his fingers over Betty’s head. “I mean. There have to be other people. The news spread pretty fast. People have to be hiding, like we are.”

“So we just wait?” Tubbo doesn’t seem enthralled by the idea, and honestly, neither is Tommy. “But how will we get food and stuff?”

“We can make trips out of the basement,” Tommy says, thinking back to last night and the adrenaline-filled trip that had brought him back here. “Get ‘food and stuff’. It’ll be easy. We just have to sneak. Like hide and seek.”

“I hate hide and seek,” Tubbo grumbles, and after everything they’d been through in the past two days, Tommy has to agree.

But for now, he shoves on a smile, and slings an arm over Tubbo’s shoulders. He’s careful not to bump the injured area. “Well,” he says, “big man, I think we’ll find this to be an adventure. Exciting. Fun. Daring. It’s better than going to school, right? We could be in maths right now and instead, we’re sitting in your basement and--”

Tommy cuts himself off before he can continue, staring across the room. And? And what? Contemplating the fact that they’re never going to see their families again? Tubbo is silent.

“Goodnight, Tommy,” he says after a long, tense moment of quiet. His bravado has been seen through like glass.

“Night,” Tommy whispers back, not even trying to hide the fear in his voice.

Tubbo’s shoulder hurts.

It’s not a surprise, really. It had been hurting, ever since he’d thrown himself outside in order to push Tommy out of the way of some sick lady, who had promptly dug her teeth into his shoulder. He can still remember it clear as day-- the smell of death, the glazed-over look in her eyes, her hands scrabbling at his skin and leaving him bleeding as Tommy pulled at his other arm to get him away. He’d been up close and personal, and it had left him with literal scars. Tubbo is not stupid, even if Tommy insists he is.

He got bitten by a stereotypical zombie, and yet he hasn't gotten sick yet.

He's unsure about the ramifications of this, but for now he'll just count his blessings. The wound hurts, but it's healing slowly and scabbing over. The lady's teeth thankfully hadn't gone very deep, and she'd been kicked off of him before it could do any real, serious damage.

He stares at the concrete floor of their basement and counts in his head, slowly.

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight granola bars. One, two, fourteen packets of crackers. Half a loaf of bread, and a bag of crisps.

Tommy's pacing halfway across the basement, hammer clutched in his hands. Tubbo doesn't think he's seen him let it go ever since the first night when he'd picked it up. He hasn't had to use it yet, which is good, but Tubbo can't help but think he might have to at some point.

One, two, three, four--

"We can't stay here," Tommy says, and it makes him jump a little. He's been so jumpy, even more than normal he's noticed, but he can't do anything about it other than flinch and jump and occasionally, cry.

"We can't go out there," Tubbo says after his heart's calmed down a little, fingers resting on the packaging of one of the bars. It crinkles under his touch. Across the room, Betty looks up from where she's lying on their blankets and eyes the food. Tubbo shakes his finger at her. No human food for dogs. At least, not right now.

"Then what do we do?" Tommy asks, stopping in his tracks and growling in frustration. He tears at his hair a bit. Tubbo sits back on his heels.

"We stay down here," he says, because it makes sense. "We stay and we wait."

"We wait for what, Tubbo? To starve to death? For one of those things to break in? For-- for your parents to come back?"

The silence there is deafening.

"If you want to leave so bad," Tubbo snaps, "then go back over and find *your* mom."

"Fuck you." Tommy snaps at him before the sentence is even finished, before Tubbo can even realize what he's said. But he's so angry and upset and in so much *pain--*

He spits back. "Fuck you!"

They fall into silence again as Tommy simmers, as Tubbo sits and stares and counts.

One, two, three, four, five, six--

Tommy's pacing swings to the left, and then his feet hit the wood of the stairs. In a heartbeat, Tubbo's stomach drops and he shoots to his feet, following and gripping at the back of his

shirt. Tommy's only made it up a few steps, and they both freeze as he tugs at the fabric and Tommy's fingers clench on the hammer.

"I'm sorry," Tubbo says, breathless. The idea of Tommy leaving him paralyzes him. "Please don't go."

Tommy's quiet, then after a second he turns, ripping the shirt fabric from Tubbo's fingers and leaving him adrift for a second. Then warm fingers are in his own, and Tommy's squeezing them punishingly tight.

"We both need clothes," he says. "I'm just gonna go raid your room. Okay? I'll be right back."

"Promise?" Tubbo asks.

"Promise," Tommy says, and it doesn't make his chest feel any lighter. No, he just feels nauseous and worried, even as Tommy cautiously makes his way out of the basement. Tubbo can't even hear his footsteps above, that's how quiet he's being. Which is reassuring, but also scary.

Betty nudges at his side, and Tubbo winces a bit as his shoulder stings. He turns, using his okay arm to pet her gently, sitting on the cool floor beside her as she whines a little.

"It's okay," he tells her. "He'll come back." Betty's eyes are glistening, and she looks on the verge of tears. Tubbo feels the same, and gently pets her ears back as she whines gently.

Tommy comes back with clothes. They change, they sit. They eat. They sleep.

Days pass, and they stay in the basement.

Tubbo convinces Tommy to stay in the dark. They both sleep restlessly, nightmares plagued with screaming zombies and bites and blood. It's like the video games, but one hundred times worse-- Tubbo's heart is constantly racing, Tommy's hands are constantly clenched around the hammer that he has yet to use. Tubbo's shoulder slowly heals, wounds turning into scabs, sitting in a half-circle on his shoulder. Eventually, he even forgoes bandages in favor of letting them "breathe," like his mum used to say whenever he or Lani would scrape their knees.

Tubbo's been counting the days. On their eleventh in the basement, the granola bars run out.

"We need more food," Tommy insists, hammer in his lap. Betty is whining in the corner. She's thin. "I need to go back up."

“We still have the bread and crisps and peanut butter,” Tubbo says, and they’ve been arguing over this for hours now. “We can wait a little longer.”

“And what?” Tommy snaps, turning to look at him. “Stave off the inevitable? We have to leave at some point, Big T. Even you. We need to go find people, we can’t survive down here on our own.”

“We can,” Tubbo says, knowing his argument is weak. He’s losing, and Tommy can obviously taste blood in the water as he slings Tubbo’s backpack over his shoulders.

“I’m going to go raid your pantry again,” Tommy says. “We’ll eat that, and then after that, we’ll leave. I’ll do some recon- recon-- I’ll do some recon while I’m up there.”

Tubbo stares him down, then wrinkles his face up. Tommy sighs.

“Really?” He asks, and Tubbo’s eyes glisten. “That’s not going to work on me, you shit.”

“Please,” Tubbo says. Tommy rolls his eyes, going over and holding his hand out. Tubbo gladly sets his own fingers in Tommy’s, who gives them a gentle squeeze.

“I’ll be right back,” he promises, and Tubbo gives in.

Betty follows Tommy up the stairs and out the door, leaving Tubbo alone in the basement. It’s the worst feeling, being down here by himself. With Tommy and Betty, at least the silence can be staved off and pushed into the dark corners of the room. Without them, it encroaches, swirling around and around until Tubbo’s stuck on the bottom of the stairs, a tiny island of sanity in the dark mass of quiet. He strains for any sort of noise-- the creak of a floorboard, the click of Betty’s nails, anything to reassure himself that Tommy is okay and coming back.

Tubbo’s not sure what he would do if Tommy didn’t come back.

He’s so focused on trying to listen, he almost misses how the door handle to the basement turns. He nearly misses when it opens, but then his eyes catch it and he snaps his head to attention.

Something bangs outside, like a car backfiring. Tubbo’s never heard a gunshot before, but he imagines that’s what it would sound like.

In an instant, the door to the basement is flung open and back closed. It’s Tommy, hair ruffled, eyes wild, and no dog in sight.

“Tommy, what was--” He’s hardly able to start to whisper before Tommy’s throwing himself down the stairs, grabbing Tubbo’s arm and pulling him towards the corner. His backpack is also nowhere in sight. He looks frantic, holding a finger to his lips.

“Shh!” He insists, and Tubbo claps a hand over his mouth as they both stumble to a corner of the basement. Tommy snags the flashlight they’d dug out of the boxes days ago and flicks it off, leaving them in the dim ambient light of the room, and Tommy doesn’t hesitate to hide them both behind one of the shelves full of boxes, bodies crammed together and tight with panic. Tubbo can feel his heartbeat in his toes.

Above them, another loud bang.

“What’s going on?!” Tubbo whispers frantically, breath hot on the palm of his own hand. Tommy shakes his head, eyes glued to the staircase.

The door opens.

Tubbo can’t see the top of the stairs from where he is now, but he can clearly hear footsteps. He presses his hand to his mouth and does not breathe. Beside him, Tommy’s chest is heaving, but he is silent. The hammer is tight in his fist, clearly ready to be used.

There’s a sneaker on the stairs, then two. Tubbo stares as legs come into view, then a body. They’ve got a backpack on, clearly, and are carrying some sort of weapon. Tubbo can’t see their face, but judging by the haircut he thinks it’s a guy.

Neither of them move.

The man turns around in a circle for a bit, and Tubbo can see the moment he sees their garbage. Evidence of their hideout is clear as day around the room. Garbage lies in one corner, their blanket-bed piled in another. Their food stash is also in said corner, and it’s only a moment before the guy is crouching beside it. Tommy’s knuckles are white against the wood of the hammer, and the guy turns.

There’s a moment where Tubbo thinks his eyes will pass right over them, ignore the two terrified kids in the basement, but then they catch. They linger. They recognize.

“Anything good down there?”

The voice makes them all jump. It’s a woman, and it’s coming from upstairs. Tubbo inhales sharply, a terrified gasp, and Tommy slams his free hand on top of Tubbo’s and practically smothers him under their combined fingers. The guy’s weapon-- an axe by the looks of it-- twists in his hand.

None of them breathe.

Then the man lets go of the axe with one hand, and raises a finger to his lips. He turns slightly, cupping the same hand to call louder, up towards the stairs. “No!” He shouts, not looking over toward where Tommy and Tubbo sit. “Just some old tools and boxes.”

“Bring up any good tools!” The woman sounds amused, and then there’s a thud from upstairs. Tommy flinches. Tubbo does as well. The guy doesn’t give them a second glance.

“I will!” He calls, and then moves away. He spends a moment over by the worktable in the corner, rummaging through the tools for a second. Tommy hefts the hammer.

“Don’t,” Tubbo whispers, the sound muffled by both of their hands. The guy hardly glances their way, although it’s clear he noticed the noise. Tommy glares. Tubbo meets his gaze, holding steadfast, and slowly shakes his head.

Neither of them move, and eventually, the man turns away. He takes some of the tools from the work table and heads back up the stairs. The clumping of his feet echoes on the floorboards and carpet above them, and Tubbo cranes his neck to listen. There's more voices, then the sound of a door shutting. Things crashing over. They're wrecking his house, he realizes, and the hands covering his mouth still get wet from the tears that suddenly spring up. They're wrecking his house to look for supplies and all he and Tommy can do is sit here and listen.

Eventually, the noise moves on. The sounds fade, although there's an occasional bang from a gun somewhere in the distance. Even that fades out, and after sitting for an hour in silence, Tommy finally moves. He unglues his hand from over Tubbo's face and Tubbo brings his own fingers down, watching as Tommy scuttles over to the stairs and glances up them. He's out of sight for a moment before coming back, the sound of the door shutting. Tubbo's out of the corner when he comes back down the stairs, crashing into his chest and refusing to move.

They stand there for a minute. Tubbo's fingers cramp from holding on so tightly to Tommy's shirt.

"We have to go," Tommy says. Tubbo nods, even though he doesn't want to.

His backpack is gone, but they find a couple older bags in one of the boxes as they tear through the basement. Tubbo for the rest of their food, Tommy for anything useful. They roll up the blankets, they pack the food and first aid kit, and Tommy hands Tubbo a bat left over from when they'd played the game as kids. He holds it out, carefully wrapping his fingers around the handle before leaning it against the wall to grab later, after he's finished packing.

"Where's Betty?" Tubbo asks at one point, staring down into the bag before him and glancing up.

"Gone," Tommy says, face tight, and Tubbo doesn't press the matter. He doesn't have to. "She ran off when she heard the first loud noise."

"Ah," Tubbo says, and he zips up the backpack with trembling fingers. "Okay."

His shoulder stings when he slings the bag onto it, and then they're ready.

Climbing the stairs feels like a trek up a mountain. Tubbo's read about altitude sickness before, and the way it steals the oxygen from your lungs and makes you knees wobble. He diagnoses himself with said disease as they make their way up the steps, feet moving softly over the wood and Tommy going first.

The door opens to the hallway of his house.

Tubbo can remember when they'd first moved in, when his mum had insisted on painting the hallway a soft green color. It was lovely, when she'd picked it, and they'd spent two days with tarp on the floor and paintbrushes in hand. There was a paint fight, ending with him and Lani getting hosed off in the backyard. The hallway is still that same color, light pouring in from the windows in the kitchen down the way. Behind them, the front door is wide open. He can see the edges of it as he peeks out, Tommy already halfway down the hall towards the

kitchen. They'd discussed a hasty plan while packing down in the basement. Tommy was going to raid the pantry one last time, and Tubbo was going to go upstairs and grab clothes and anything else he thought was important. Tommy was already halfway into the kitchen, so Tubbo inhales and grips his bat carefully, moving down to the stairs.

It's only been two weeks since he's been in his room, and yet it's like walking into another person's house entirely. His posters are still on the walls in his bedroom, his sheets untucked and things strewn across the floor. Someone's obviously ransacked the place, but it's practically just as he left it.

Quietly, Tubbo sits in the middle of his room and cries.

Only for a few minutes. His tears are starting to dry up at this point, and he even feels a little exasperated by himself. Eventually, he scrubs away the tears from his eyes and forces himself to look for anything useful. There's not much in his room. It's not worth taking the laptop or his phone, and it's not worth taking any of his other things, like books. He does take a couple books he thinks might be useful-- a little survival guide his dad had gotten him one summer when they'd gone hiking once, and just another one next to it as his fingers move without him asking to. The bathrooms are his next target-- Tommy had raided the one he shared with Lani, but he decides to check again. The shelves are fairly clear, so he leaves it be.

The door to Lani's room is open, and he peeks inside.

It's mostly untouched. Dirt on the floor indicates that someone's been here, probably earlier, but nothing has been taken. Her room is as purple and lovely as she left it. Tubbo wanders, eyes drifting sightlessly over a dusty laptop and dirty laundry in the corner, the lampshade knocked slightly askew from an errant throw of stuffed animals in a war that never ended between the two of them.

Gently, Tubbo picks up one of them, a little stuffed monkey that had been gifted to her a few Christmases ago. It wasn't her favorite, he knows. That honor went to a ragged dog that must be hidden somewhere in the center of her bed, purple spotted bed sheets rumpled like someone had just gotten up and left.

Tubbo clutches the monkey to his chest and refuses to let himself shed any more tears.

Tommy is waiting downstairs.

So he shoves the monkey away into his backpack, beside the books and clothing he'd grabbed from his own room, and leaves Lani's room as is. He shuts the door behind him and forces himself to move on for the moment.

The stairs creak as he plods down them, having filled his bag with things from upstairs, and at the bottom is the front door. It's still slightly open from someone entering, and maybe Tommy before had closed it. But Tubbo takes a moment, holding his breath as he peers outside and into the street.

He doesn't look long. There are clearly bodies strewn across the pavement, no movement to be seen. Outside reeks, and he slams a hand over his nose before he can realize what he's

doing and chokes on the smell. It's terrible, and he has to hold back tears from the sheer weight of it as he leans back inside. How didn't he notice that earlier? The smell certainly had crept inside, no doubt, but outside was ten times worse. Tubbo takes a moment, fingers still clenched over his mouth and nose as his stomach rolls, before shutting the door carefully and creeping to the kitchen.

"Tommy?" He calls, poking his head inside and then leaning against the door. Tommy's kneeling on the floor by the pantry, tugging at his hair, and Tubbo doesn't mention how his shoulders flinch at the noise.

"Right here," Tommy calls, glancing over his shoulder and relaxing a bit when Tubbo comes more into view. It's like a balm has been soothed over an open wound for both of them--being apart is stressful. Tubbo hates it, so in this second he decrees that they'll never split up again if he has anything to say about it.

"Anything useful?" Tubbo asks quietly, moving forward to go by Tommy and kneel at his side. They sit there, the dregs of a pantry once-full at their fingertips, and Tommy pats his backpack.

"A little," he says, but doesn't expand on it. Tubbo will just count their things later. Once they've left.

Right.

They're leaving.

Tommy slings his bag over his shoulders, securing it in place, and Tubbo moves to stand up with him. They're both clinging on to each other's hands, and the warmth of another palm in his is reassuring to say the least. At least there's someone alive who he can trust. Maybe more, if they can find someone they know.

"Where are we going to go?" Tubbo asks after a second, because he certainly has no clue. Tommy doesn't look like he has any idea either, but after a minute he slaps on a smile and gives Tubbo's hand a squeeze.

"Anywhere we want, Big T," he tells him, and Tubbo tries to give him a smile back. It feels forced. "I say we head towards city center, yeah? Try and find some other people? Maybe some more food? Maybe we can hotwire a car."

"Do you know how to hotwire a car?" Tubbo quirks a brow, skeptical.

Despite his look, Tommy just grins wider. "Nope! Can't be that hard, right?"

"Surely not. But we don't know how to drive?" Again, Tubbo is skeptical. Cars are large and made of metal and dangerous. They frighten him a tiny bit, even when the world was relatively normal. Tommy spreads his free arm out and around, pointing at the windows. One of them is cracked.

"Do you see any police around here?" He asks, and Tubbo wrinkles his nose.

“Well... no.”

Tommy is triumphant. “There we go!” He declares, puffing his chest out a little bit. “We can drive.” Tubbo’s still stuck looking out the window, however, eyes narrowed a little bit. Something about that had stuck with him, and he’s suddenly noticed something that maybe he should’ve thought about sooner.

“It’s weird, isn’t it though? No police? You’d think the army would’ve stepped in by now, right?” He asks, taking a step or two away from Tommy to peer out the window into their back garden. It’s empty, the sky slightly tinted grey, and what he can see of the street beyond it is empty except for... well. Things he doesn’t want to think about, so he won’t.

“Maybe they have. Maybe we just have to go find them,” Tommy says hesitantly, and Tubbo can see him gnawing on his lip to the side. “We could head to... I don’t know. London? If there’s a safe place, I bet it’s there.”

Tubbo tips his head to the side, conceding. “It’s a start.”

“Sure is. Let’s go, before it gets any later. We shouldn’t walk around at night, I don’t think,” Tommy points out, and rocks on his toes. Tubbo shakes his head.

“No, definitely not.”

They both fall quiet, looking around the ransacked and dusty kitchen. Tubbo feels his chest well up, like it wants to just explode and leave him a hollow, empty shell on the floor. But he refuses to let that happen. Instead, he pushes down the hurt, pushes away the sad, and grips tight to Tommy’s hand. He tucks his bat under his elbow and raises his fingers gently, giving the room a little wave.

“Goodbye, house,” he says quietly. Thankfully, Tommy doesn’t tease him. “I’ll see you again someday.”

They give themselves one more moment of quiet peace before heading out into the street.

Chapter End Notes

for peace of mind: betty is not dead. she just ran away :)

there's only going to be two chapters of this fic, but i can't promise when the other will be uploaded! it'll probably be longer. if you can guess who's going to make an appearance, i'll give u a cookie >:)

must come down

Chapter Notes

hey yall, a bit of a warning for this chapter of general gore and vomit! please be wary going forward-- this is a zombie fic after all, and it's going to be a little violent.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Outside is hellish.

Tommy ends up ripping up a shirt from Tubbo's bag and tying the scraps of fabric over both of their faces, ends knotted on the backs of their heads and mouths and noses covered as they go. There are bodies outside from the poor, unfortunate souls who had gotten bitten more than once-- more than a dozen times, maybe. And in the warm days between the beginning and now, those bodies were decaying.

By the sixth one, Tommy doesn't really notice the horror anymore. Yes, it's frightening, and yes, he'll have nightmares, but his eyes skip over the gore and the terror in the moment is dulled in his stomach. Tubbo is not as lucky-- he throws up the first time they have to walk by a body, and Tommy doesn't tease him for it. He only just holds back the bile in his own throat.

Thankfully, there don't seem to be any of the walking dead around them for the moment.

"Where have they all gone?" Tubbo asks quietly, an hour into their journey. They're heading for the center of town, which would usually be an hour trip at most by car. Walking is going to take a while. "The zombies?"

"Dunno," Tommy says, picking his way through the trashed street. There's a car on it's side up ahead, and he heads toward it almost unconsciously. Tubbo trails behind him, glass crunching under his feet.

"It was a Tuesday," Tubbo reasons quietly, mostly to himself. Tommy's not really listening. "So people would've been on their way to work and school. Maybe that's why there aren't very many zombies around. There weren't many people in the first place."

"Could be." Tommy's finally reached the car, which is tilted on its side and has parts strewn across the road. It's not usable by any means, but he's going to peek inside anyways. Tubbo's feet crunch and Tommy comes around the side of the thing--

and there's someone lunging at him.

They're not alive. That's clear by the holes in their cheeks, the blackened fingertips and unholy screeching noise that comes out of their bloated throat. Tommy scrambles backwards

and away, Tubbo shouting in a panic behind as he scrambles for a moment. The person-- woman?-- the monster lunges and for a second, Tommy is frozen.

Then someone swings.

The monster's head makes a sickening crunching noise when the bat in Tubbo's hand connects with their skull, and Tommy grimaces as something splatters off of them and onto the ground. The monster is dazed-- not dead. But it's enough of a distraction for Tubbo to hold a hand out and for Tommy to grab it and haul himself off the ground from where he'd fallen, and for them to bolt down the street away from the car and the monster. It takes a moment to recover before shrieking again, and somewhere Tommy can hear more shrieking.

"Shit!" He cries, and there's nowhere really for them to go. A glance behind them shows the monster running after them. Despite being dead, they're apparently quick motherfuckers. "Shit!!!"

"Shut up!" Tubbo shouts, and Tommy resists the urge to hit him or trip him and instead growls, then skids and swings Tubbo around ninety degrees.

"House!" Tommy calls out. There are plenty of houses around them-- most of their doors are wide open while some are still closed. Not everything has been looted yet, but it's well on its way to being so. The house Tommy's urging Tubbo towards has a wide-open door that they don't hesitate to barrel through, and Tommy slams it shut behind them. Screw locks-- they need to move. Hands still clasped, Tommy pulls Tubbo through the hallway of this unfamiliar house and then promptly out the back door when he sees one. The garden is enclosed, a fence surrounding the green grass behind it, and Tommy takes a moment to stop. Tubbo is panting, and Tommy is doing the same. His chest feels like it's on fire.

"Fuck," Tubbo says between breaths. Tommy can't find his own to agree. The thing from moments ago is clearly pounding on the front door, screeching it's dead head off, and Tommy has never been more frightened in his life.

"What do we do?" Tommy asks, and Tubbo gives him a look that clearly means he wants to call him an idiot.

"Run," he says. "We were supposed to keep *running*-- "

Tommy throws a hand up in the air, then snaps it back down to grip at his hammer when the banging on the front door continues. Something cracks. "Well! I panicked! Sorry for panicking!"

"You *literally* did the worst-- fuck!! Fuck!" Tubbo shrieks as they both hear crashing, the door splintering inwards as the monster makes it through. They're pressed all the way to the edge of the fence, and Tommy judges the height for a second and then drops the hammer, interlocking his fingers.

"Up," he insists, and Tubbo bites his lip and then slips his sneaker into Tommy's hand. It's a struggle for a moment as Tommy boosts him and Tubbo uses a weakened arm to haul himself

over, but then he's gone and there's a thud on the other side of the fence. Tubbo's hand pokes over the top, and Tommy swoops down, snagging the hammer.

The zombie-thing from before stumbles into the yard.

"Tommy?" Tubbo's hand flaps frantically. "Come on!"

Tommy doesn't have time to react, or move, or even grab Tubbo's hand. This had been a stupid plan, and if he dies here, on the other side of the fence, Tubbo will be alone. And Tommy can't leave him alone, even if it kills the both of them. So he holds tight to the wooden handle that's become so familiar to his palm in the last week and a half, and swings.

There's another sickening crunch as bones crumples, as Tommy watches the woman's dead face shift and smash. He doesn't hold back-- he just shuts his eyes and pulls his arm away and hits her again over the head, downwards, smashing her into the ground with another repulsive sound, and then she's still. For the most part at least. Fingers twitch and brain leaks out of eyes and nose and wounds but Tommy doesn't want to look, can't look, so he turns and grabs Tubbo's hand and hauls himself over the fence before he has to keep hitting her.

"Are you okay?" They're in another back garden, another house looming in front of them, and Tommy's so pumped full of adrenaline Tubbo's words don't really register. They float by on clouds of white tinged with red and green and grey guts. Tommy doesn't think brains are pink like on tv. They seemed grey, just then. The house above them is stark against the blue of the sky, and Tommy's fingers are shaking. The hammer is bloody. So are his hands.

Tubbo has given up on talking to him, apparently, because when they move next it's inside. Tubbo is quiet, leading Tommy by his upper arm carefully and peering around corners, feet quiet against the wooden floors of this house. It's empty, and Tubbo stations them in an upstairs bedroom and blocks off the door by shoving a desk. It screeches against the floor when he moves it, and both of them wince.

Tommy just sits on the bed. His mouth doesn't seem to want to move, so he doesn't force it. It's too much work.

He'll only talk later, when the sun is setting, and Tubbo's carefully washed the blood off of Tommy's hands with water on a spare shirt that's now a rag. The hammer is gently pried from his fingers, still curled around it and aching, and bruised.

"I can't believe I did that," he says into the dim light of the bedroom. Outside, the street lights are flipping on. They provide a strange ambiance to the room, yellow light pouring through the windows and making Tubbo's dark hair look orange. Tommy's must look gold. They're both lying in some stranger's queen-sized bed, shoes on and not under any blankets. Neither of them ate that night.

"You had to," Tubbo says quietly, and there's the shuffle of sheets as he rolls over to face Tommy. "She was already..."

"I know," Tommy says, and it sounds too loud so he lowers his voice when he speaks next. "I didn't want to."

“I’m sorry,” Tubbo whispers after a moment of silence. For one of the first times in his life, Tommy finds there’s nothing else that can really be said, so after a moment, he rolls over and shuts his eyes.

They’ve decided on city center, so that’s where they head. In hindsight, when they’re older and know better, they’ll whack each other on the heads and blame the other for the decision. But the truth is, it’s a mutual one borne out of hope and the need to find other people. It’s a foolish decision made by foolish kids, but it’s the best one they could have possibly made in the moment.

Their trek is quiet. Uncharacteristically so. Usually, Tommy would fill the silence between them with jokes and banter and bad impressions, or talk about everything and anything. That was the thing about their friendship-- Tommy and Tubbo could talk for hours about anything at all. Or, they could sit in comfortable silence, content to do their own separate things. This silence is the antithesis of any silence they’ve ever had before. It’s uncomfortable. It’s awkward. They’re both frightened beyond words and neither want to admit it.

They avoid the streets, instead traveling through backyards. It’s easier than dealing with whatever’s out there, and instead, they cross through gardens and playscapes and dirt patches and climb fences. Tommy gets used to the feeling of Tubbo’s sneaker in his hands, and Tubbo gets used to pulling Tommy over them with his good shoulder. Neither of them complain about their aches and pains-- they just go. Occasionally, they enter houses and creep around corners to peer at street signs, trying to get a grasp on how far they are from the city center.

Eventually, backyards stop becoming as frequent. Eventually, there starts to be more and more of the walking dead, shuffling along the streets.

“What do we do?” Tubbo asks, watching from an upstairs window of a house they’d taken shelter in for the second night. Tommy’s legs hurt from how much they’d walked. After a second, he pushes himself up and joins Tubbo at the window, peering down.

A few shuffling shapes fill the street, the setting sun leaving the place filled with shadows. Tommy counts seven of them.

“I have no idea,” he admits, resting his chin on his arms. They sit there for a while at the window, just... watching.

“I wonder what’s making them sick,” Tubbo says softly, and Tommy moves to crack open the window a bit so they can get a better look as the sun sets further. It’s almost completely dark now, but the streetlights have kicked on. The power grid has yet to fail.

“Something sciencey,” Tommy says, and a moan echoes through their heads as one of the zombies shuffles closer to the house they’re in. “I bet you’d like it, whatever it is. The

explanation.”

“If it was in a movie, I would.” Tubbo’s eyes glint gold in the orange light from the streetlamps. “At least those make sense. This is much more confusing.”

Tommy scratches an itch on his face, and then yawns slightly. His legs hurt still, and sitting here at the window isn’t helping. “Maybe we’re in a movie,” he suggests. “We just don’t know it yet.”

“What?” Tubbo turns to look at him, and he’s grinning a bit. “That doesn’t make sense.”

“Sure it does.” Tommy taps his face. “They’re all actors down there. And stuff. None of this is real, of course. It’s just... an experiment.”

“It’s a mean experiment if it is one,” Tubbo says. “Are we the main characters?”

“I think so,” Tommy reasons. “I mean. Look at us. Don’t we seem like main character types?” He holds up an arm, strongman posing, and Tubbo bursts into snickering laughter.

“Your arms look like sticks!” He says, muffling his laughter into his arm as Tommy splutters in rage and embarrassment. His arms don’t look like sticks, he’s just.... He’s just thin! His mom said he would grow into it! “That was so lame!”

“You’re lame!” Tommy throws back at him, and then drawn by Tubbo’s laughter, giggles despite himself. It’s contagious, and now, they’re both laughing. Tommy still doesn’t feel great, but this is... well, it’s better than the relative silence they had walked through today.

They both settle down after a minute or two, and Tubbo’s back to looking out the window. Tommy follows his gaze, and there’s a moment of quiet.

“To be honest,” Tubbo says. “I don’t think we’re in a movie.”

“No,” Tommy admits. “Me neither.”

“But if we were in a movie, what would we do?” Tubbo asks. Tommy’s face screws up as he thinks, turning to look at him.

“What?” He asks.

Tubbo shifts, gesturing outside lightly. “In a movie. What would we do? We can’t leave the house right now. I only have a bat and you have a hammer, but if they swarm us, I don’t think we can fight them. If they’re not gone by morning, what do we do?” He’s still got his eyes out the window and on the monsters, and it’s.. It’s a good question. Tommy gnaws on his lip.

“Um. Run really really fast?” He suggests. Tubbo tips his head.

“Maybe. That’d be really dangerous, though,” he says. Tommy huffs, sitting there for a moment longer. Everything they do is going to be fucking dangerous at this point. They’re not in a movie. This is real life. It makes his stomach sick to think about, so after a minute, he moves to get up and move away from the window and the stench of death.

“Well, I’m going to sleep on it. I’m fucking tired. My legs hurt. You can do the thinking thing, I’m going to do the sleeping thing,” he says, shuffling over to their blankets and pillows, scattered across the floor.

Tubbo snorts. “Yeah, okay. Night, Tommy.”

Tommy hesitates, pausing before grabbing a blanket and creating a makeshift spot to sleep. “You sleep too. Okay?”

“Mhm.” Tubbo’s dismissive, but Tommy doesn’t bother to argue right now. He just lays his head down, keeping Tubbo in his sight as he does.

“....night,” he says quietly. Hours later-- he can’t really tell, as he dozes in and out of consciousness-- someone ends up crawling up next to him.

Morning comes with bright light through windows. For a second, Tommy’s back in his bedroom at home, the smell of breakfast and eggs floating through their house and waking him up. It’s a Saturday afternoon, and he stumbles down the stairs still in his pajamas as his mum smiles and ruffles his hair.

“*Lazy Sunday, huh?*” She asks. She has no jaw. Tommy’s not sure how she’s talking without a jaw. Her tongue hangs out, lazy and droopy, and when he looks down in horror the eggs in the pan are grey and scrambled.

He wakes up for real this time with a jolt, fists clutching as the sheets and the ghostly smell of eggs fading from his nose. Tommy doesn’t think he’ll be eating anything today, his stomach roiling as he fights back the bile rising in his throat.

You’re okay, he thinks to himself, staring at the mop of brown hair beside him. Slowly, he matches his breath to Tubbo’s, slow and steady. *You’re alive.*

For now.

He lays there for a little bit, letting himself calm down off the panic of his dream, and just breathes. Beside him, Tubbo appears to still be asleep, arm strewn over and invading Tommy’s space. He doesn’t move it. He just lies there, feeling the warmth of the sun on his face and listening carefully for anything around them or anything that might be coming up the stairs. Or anyone.

It’s quiet, though. The neighborhood is too quiet. It unsettles him. It makes him uncomfortable. Usually, this close to the town center, there’d be the noise of people going about their lives and doing things. But instead, it’s just an eerie, terrible silence.

It doesn’t help that they’re squatting in some presumed dead person’s house.

Eventually, Tubbo rolls over, eyes blinking open and sleep crusting the corners. Tommy will blink back at him. Quietly, they’ll get up, they’ll shove their feet into their shoes and pack their things, stuffing backpacks full and snacking quietly on granola bars and peanut butter

sandwiches. Eventually, they'll creep down the stairs of this unfamiliar house and quietly go through the kitchen.

"This feels invasive," Tubbo says quietly, opening the fridge and then immediately closing it again with disgust. "Ugh. Something's gone bad."

"It is invasive," Tommy points out, rummaging through a shelf and then clambering off the counter to go check another. "This isn't our house. We're stealing."

"It's necessary," Tubbo says, voice light. "Right?"

"It is," Tommy assures him. This is something he's pretty sure of-- they need food to survive, and stuff to be able to get through however long they're going to be alone for. A huge part of zombie video games was scavenging, wasn't it? Finding the things you needed in other people's spaces. He turns, shuffling, and swings open a cabinet, then freezes. "Woah. Tubbo. Come look."

"What?" Tubbo shuts the drawer he'd been looking in, and goes over, eyeing the cabinet Tommy had opened with mild interest. "What about it?"

"It's alcohol!" Tommy grins, pulling down a bottle with a colorful label, half-empty. "I've never had shit like this before!"

"Tommy," Tubbo says, and he sounds scolding. "We're not old enough to drink that."

Well, duh. Tommy knows this. But Tommy also knows that they haven't seen any police at all in the past few days. He uncaps the half-empty bottle, gives it a sniff. It smells like alcohol and some sort of fruit, and when he reads the label, it says vodka. "Yeah," he says, sniffing it again, "but who's here to stop us?"

"Tommy," Tubbo says again, reaching out and snagging the bottle from him. "Don't be dumb! We'd get drunk! Plus, it doesn't even taste good!"

"Oh yeah? How do you know?" Tommy snickers, tearing the bottle back. "Had some before?"

"No!" Tubbo says, defensive. Then shrugs. "Well. My dad used to let me sip sometimes, but it wasn't even good. It's all... gross. And it hurts to drink."

"Coward," Tommy says, and takes a swig from the open bottle.

As he gargles the taste from his mouth, a wet splotch on the floor, Tubbo leans against the counter beside him and rolls his eyes.

"I told you," he says. Tommy tears his mouth away from the running sink in order to stick his tongue out at him, and flip him off at the same time. He hates when Tubbo's right.

Despite the godawful taste, and the fact that neither of them are even remotely interested in any of the liquor, Tommy finds himself packing a bottle into his bag anyways before they go. Who knows, he reasons. It might come in handy at some point.

They head into the backyard first, voices trailing off into silence as they step into the sunshine. It's a beautiful day, all things considered, but Tommy's got a knife now on his hip that he stole from the knife block and his hammer in hand. Tubbo's still wielding that bat. They're cautious-- very cautious, working their way through backyards again until finally, they run out of backyards.

"Well," Tommy says, keeping his voice low. Tubbo glances over, then back at the street. "Got any ideas?"

Tubbo does not have any ideas. Tubbo has no clue what they're doing, what their plan is, what they're supposed to be heading towards, here. Their idea had been to get to the city center, but the number of zombies they see is only rising as they get closer.

"Maybe we should turn around," he says softly, thumping back into the grass of the backyard they'd landed in. "Go somewhere else. Find alive people, like the people who... who were at the house, sometime. There have to be other people."

"Yeah," Tommy says, and then he's thumping down beside Tubbo as well from where he'd been scouting the street above the fence. "But will they be nice? Or will they hurt us too?"

"They wouldn't hurt us," Tubbo says, anxiety clawing at his stomach. "We-- they're people too. Why wouldn't they help us? We're kids."

"Pretty capable for two kids," Tommy says, glancing down at the hammer in his hand. That hammer, which had made such sickening squelchy noises as it saved Tommy's life. Tubbo tightens his grip around the wooden handle of the bat he's carrying, feeling his shoulder twinge a bit. "But. Yeah. I dunno."

"I think we should try and find other people," Tubbo insists. "We can't just... keep wandering around aimlessly."

"I mean, we could."

"You'll die!"

"What? Why just me?? You think I'm not strong enough to--"

"Tommy, I got bit!" Tubbo reaches up with his free hand, tugging down his shirt a bit and tapping at the place on his shoulder that's still fresh and pink with new skin. "But I didn't die. I didn't turn into one of them."

“Maybe it takes more than one bite,” Tommy says weakly. Tubbo shakes his head.

“Last night,” he says, glancing at the fence and lowering his voice. They’re being too loud. “Last night, I watched the zombies down on the street. Most of them only had one... spot, it looked like. That was more decayed than the rest of them.”

“So... what does that mean?” Tommy asks. The thing is, though, Tommy is smart, and Tubbo knows this. Tommy is looking at him like he already knows what it means. They both do. For a second, they just stare at each other in silence, and then Tommy blows out a breath of air as it becomes clear Tubbo’s not going to answer him. Tubbo doesn’t want to answer him, doesn’t want to face the facts that are clearly laid out in front of them.

“There’s a Tesco’s down the road,” Tommy says finally, dropping the subject in favor of putting a hand on the fence, wood stained grey from the elements. Tubbo mirrors him, splaying his fingers over the surface of it and glancing upwards to where the sky hits the edge of it. His nail catches on a splinter and he glances back at Tommy, waiting. “We could run down the street, hole ourselves up in there. There’ll be food and stuff in there. Shit we need.”

“And people,” Tubbo says before he can stop himself. “Other people will have the same idea we do. And we won’t be alone anymore.”

“C’mon, Big T, we’re not alone.” Tommy grins, reaching out with his off-hand and rapping his knuckles against Tubbo’s forehead. He smiles despite himself at the gesture.

“Sap,” he teases, then shifts on his knees. “So, we just run?”

“I think it’s our best bet. We outran the other one, right?” Tommy says, and they both shift and peek up above the wood again. There are two zombies in sight, and more than a few abandoned cars and structures in the vicinity. Who knows how many there really are, out there. Down the street, the Tesco is bright white and red and blue, the doors hanging half open and scattered papers lying about.

One shifts in the wind slightly, and Tubbo watches as the zombies shuffle.

“We could make a distraction,” he suggests, sinking back down to his knees and glancing around. They’re in someone’s back garden-- it’s not long until he finds what he’s looking for, the bricks lining the gravel path easy to pull out of the loose dirt. He hefts it in his hands, and when he glances up, Tommy’s grinning.

“Hell fucking yes,” he says, coming over to pull one out for himself.

“Aim for something on the other end of the street,” Tubbo says, crawling over to the fence again. There’s a car halfway down the road that he’s going to aim for, and Tommy’s at his side in an instant. “Once they’re down there, we run.”

“Sounds good,” Tommy says, and then they’re quiet. He’s waiting, Tubbo realizes, and after a second he stirs himself back to life.

“On three,” Tubbo whispers. “One, two--”

Crash . Tommy's gone and thrown his early, of course, and Tubbo pops up and sighs and does the same. Tommy's gotten a lucky throw-- he's hit one of the cars in it's windshield, the glass crashing and breaking even more than it already had been. Tubbo's brick doesn't quite make it as spot-on, but the ringing of metal on brick makes it clear that he's hit something. They watch as the zombies in the street perk up and immediately go for the cars, the opposite direction of the Tesco, and another one appears from behind a car that neither of them had spotted before. They wait a breath, then two, and then.

"Now!" Tommy whisper-shouts, and Tubbo plants his foot in Tommy's hands and vaults himself over the fence. Tommy's following him a moment later, straining his shoulder and pulling him over with a thump. They don't hesitate-- they run. The pavement pounds under his feet as they go and glass crackles and paper rips, but Tubbo doesn't stop. They dodge a car and behind it is a fallen lamppost, which Tommy jumps over with ease. Tubbo takes it a bit slower, swinging one leg over and then the other.

"C'mon!" Tommy hisses, and behind them, footsteps. They're off like a shot again, down the street and racing to the shops.

The Tesco door is open and so they both swing in with ease. What is more startling is the zombie inside the store.

"Shit!" Tommy shouts, which doesn't help at all, as the dead thing-- woman-- it just turns towards them, drawn clearly by the noise of their entrance.

It's like a movie , Tubbo thinks to himself, hefting the bat in his hands and swinging. He'd done this before, when Tommy had been jumped in the street. The feeling is just as awful as the first time. Behind him, Tommy is shouting and the doors are being pulled shut and Tubbo swings. The *crack* is clearly audible. *Movie* , he reminds himself, pulling the weapon back and slamming it down again, squeezing his eyes shut as he does so. Even without sight, he doesn't miss. Another crack comes, and it sounds like a watermelon, like when they'd tugged rubber bands taught around one until it had popped last summer, making a mess of the backyard. He swings one more time, panting with exertion, and this time there's no sound of movement.

"We've got to get in the back," Tommy says, rushing past him and stoically ignoring the dead person on the floor, blackish-blue fingers splayed and reaching for them. Despite the clear dent in their head, their fingers still scrabble at Tubbo's ankle. "The doors lock, come on, come on--"

Tubbo goes, following Tommy wordlessly as they rush through the isles and towards the safe back room. Most of the shelves are vandalized already, he notes as they rush through him, but the door to the back room is open. Up front, something smashes through the glass doors. Tommy pulls them both through the doorway and into the small back room and then the door is shutting and they're alone.

The lock clicks, heavy metal separating them from the things that had been chasing.

"Shit," Tommy says, leaning against the door and sinking slowly, breath coming unevenly.

Tubbo drops his bat, turns, and promptly vomits into the conveniently-upturned bin.

“Shit,” Tommy says again, and then he’s beside Tubbo and gently slipping the backpack off his shoulders and rubbing his back. Tubbo thinks about his mum and her gentle hands on his back whenever he was sick, and immediately retches again.

It’s some time later when they both come to, Tubbo dragging himself out of his sick reverie and Tommy following. They sit against the wall, shoulder-to-shoulder, and pass a water bottle back and forth.

“It’s so much worse than on TV,” Tubbo says softly, and Tommy nods.

“Yeah,” he says, and that’s the end of that conversation.

Outside, they can hear the sounds of shuffling footsteps and groaning noises. Cliche, but true. There’s no window in this small back room. It’s an office, by the looks of it, a safe in the corner and filing cabinets, a desk pushed to one side of the room. There’s no window, and so Tubbo has no idea what time it is when Tommy finally suggests they tug their blankets out of their bags and try to rest. Tubbo lays down and listens as the quiet sounds of shuffling eventually fade away, until all that’s left is the quiet breathing of both him and Tommy lying there. It’s not even dark-- the lights are still on, harsh LEDs shining into his eyes and making the backs of his eyelids pink when he shuts them.

“We’ll stay here,” Tommy says, some unknown amount of time later. “As long as we can.”

Tubbo does not have the strength to argue even if he wanted to. “Okay,” he says.

Sleep does not come easy.

Morning comes with silence and food.

“This is awesome,” Tommy says, once they’ve cracked open the door and found the Tesco relatively empty. There’s a body twitching in the front, yes, and a smashed window where anything could get through, but they find if they’re quiet enough and smart enough, they can get around the shop easily. The fridges are bad-- the food in them has gone out of date at this point, although Tubbo reckons the pickles are probably fine. Some of the drinks are also alright, and they both drink three things of apple juice each before Tubbo mentions the idea of rationing.

The shelves are ransacked, but not everything is gone. There’s food still, candy enough for each of them to get sick on it, and Tubbo thinks well enough to grab some of the bandages left in the desolate parts of the store.

“Tubbo,” Tommy says at one point, having crept into the back room with him. Tubbo’s been stockpiling as Tommy’s been bringing shit in, locking the door with every trip. “Look.”

In his hands are fistfuls of cash.

“How did you get that?” Tubbo asks, a hand coming up to cover his mouth as a giggle comes out. “What do we even need it for?”

“One of the registers was open. It’s cash! Cold hard cash!” Tommy grins, splaying the bills out in his fingers. “Here. I’ll pay you a hundred pounds for a Snickers.”

“Snickers is worth way more than a hundred pounds,” Tubbo says, reaching out to snap up the candy bar and hold it close to his chest. Tommy eyes him, grinning wildly as he shuffles the money from hand to hand. Tubbo plays along. “Try two hundred.”

“Hmmm,” Tommy says, tapping his chin and then shuffling the bills in his hands around once again, before throwing them all towards Tubbo in a flurry of money. “Fuck it, it’s worth it. Take the lot!” Tubbo laughs, and they’re both giggling as money floats down around them like snowflakes. A moment of brevity in the middle of everything terrible, and Tubbo appreciates it. They pick up the money a few minutes later, splitting the Snickers down the middle and sharing despite the exchange of cash. It’s useless now, Tubbo knows, but it’s still fun to count over and over in his hands, shuffling fingers over the paper and wondering who had held it last.

They hang out in the office most days, hiding from the outside world. Tommy shoves the desk and cabinets into the corner and they spread their blankets around, stockpiling everything they can possibly bring into the small room. Tubbo counts-- he counts the money, the number of juice boxes, the number of crisp bags they have piled on the desk and in the corner. It’s calming, knowing just how much they have. And they have a lot. Yes, the store had been half-empty when they’d arrived, but they’d managed to scrounge up plenty of helpful things. Now it’s just a waiting game, and Tubbo’s... Tubbo’s not sure what they’re waiting for. He wants people. Tommy refuses to talk about it, so they simply don’t. They just spend their days inside the office room with the door locked, occasionally going out into the store when all is quiet and keeping an eye out for any monsters. They see plenty of them-- shuffling dead, rotting faces and blank eyes. Tubbo had read once about the stages of decay, morbid curiosity one summer when he’d found a dead raccoon on the side of their street. He thinks of those pictures now, as they hide behind shelving and avoid the sight lines of any of the scary creatures.

It’s easier to think of them like video game monsters than anything else, so it’s what they do. They turn the daily scavenger hunt of the store into a game, ducking behind counters and seeing who can make the most reckless move without getting caught. Tommy always wins-- Tubbo’s too cautious to play this game truthfully. It’s fun, however, and their spirits lift no matter how confined they feel. It’s safe here, for the most part. There are a few close calls, as always, but they just hide in their den until the sounds of zombies move away and it’s safe to go out again.

It’s the third day of them building this careful hideout when the lights go out.

It's sudden. One moment, Tubbo is flipping through a scuffed magazine and the next, he's staring into a blank empty void. It's dark-- dark enough that he can't see his hand when he gently holds it up in front of his face and waves.

"Tubbo?" Tommy had been sitting across the room from him quietly, messing with a magazine of his own before the lights had gone out and occasionally trading quips. Now, though, he just sounds frightened.

"I'm here," Tubbo says softly. "I think the power grid's failed."

"Hah," Tommy says, and Tubbo can hear his breathing pick up. "That's-- that's good. Thought I'd died just then. Or gone blind. Can you imagine if I'd just suddenly gone blind? Maybe it's a side effect of the disease, you know--"

"Tommy." Tubbo cuts into the panicked spiel, shuffling the magazine slightly as he moves it to the side. "Tommy, it's okay. It's just the dark. Give your eyes a second to adjust."

Even as he says it, his own eyes are already adjusting ever so slightly. There's no window to let light into the small room, but there's a crack under the door that emits the softest of glows as Tubbo feels around and shuffles. He can hear Tommy breathing somewhere across the room, fast and short.

"I can't believe the lights went out," Tommy breathes, voice shaky. Tubbo finally finds what he's looking for-- a small lantern, one they'd picked up from the floor out there the first day. They'd stuck batteries in it and hoped for the best despite the plastic being broken in front of the bulb and it pays off now, as his fingers find the switch and clumsily flick it on.

The effect is instant, a yellow-y glow filling the room and replacing the stark lights of the LEDs on the ceiling. It's coming from Tubbo's hands, the lantern casting shadows on the walls and making him feel like a firefly as the thing briefly blinks. Tubbo hits it once with the palm of his hand and it steadies out. When he glances up, Tommy's still across the room, back pressed against the wall and eyes as big as dinner plates-- his chest is moving up and down hard, a panicked look on his face. Tubbo sets the lantern down and crawls over, holding a hand out, and Tommy easily slaps his own into his palm.

"It's okay," Tubbo says quietly. "It was just the powergrid."

Around them, the Tesco is silent. The soft sounds of refrigerator humming they'd been living with is gone now, and it's just them and the sounds of their breathing as they sit there. Tubbo keeps his slow and calm, and over time, Tommy's comes to match it.

"Fucking hell," Tommy eventually mutters, fingers warm against Tubbo's palm. "I seriously thought I had just gone blind for a second there."

Tubbo laughs, glancing toward the door and outside. It's been a few hours since they'd come back in after waking up, and it's probably late afternoon or sunset already. "I wonder if it's out everywhere," he says, shifting gently to get up. Tommy's grip on his hand becomes like iron, so Tubbo simply pulls him up along with him as he moves to the door. They're both

quiet, Tubbo pressing his ear to the metal, but outside is silent. So he unlocks the door and gently cracks it open.

The store is no longer lit up by harsh LEDs and now, instead, there are shadows everywhere. The sun is setting, leaving the whole room cast in colors of gold and orange.

“I wonder if we can get on the roof,” Tommy says quietly, and Tubbo glances back at him. It’s not a bad idea-- they’d be able to see more from up there. But it’s getting too dark for him to comfortably want to try, so instead he just moves to shut the door once again and lock it carefully.

“Tomorrow,” Tubbo says, glancing up at the ceiling and then back at Tommy. “When it’s light out.”

“Fine by me,” Tommy says, not bothering to argue, and that’s how Tubbo *knows* he was shaken by the lights going out so suddenly. He smiles, tugging Tommy down to the floor and their blanket nest, picking up the magazine he had dropped in favor of finding the lantern earlier. The lantern that now sits on the desk, lighting the room and letting Tubbo flip to the page he’d left off on earlier.

“Help me read,” he says, keeping his tone light and bossy. “The print’s too small for me.”

“Yeah, alright,” Tommy says, taking one corner of the magazine and half-slipping it into his lap, squinting at the letters. “What the hell is this?”

“National Geographic!” Tubbo chirps, leaning his head forward and pointing. “It’s about anteaters.”

“They’re fucking ugly.”

“I know, right?”

They don’t manage to get on the roof. It’s not a flat surface-- instead, the roof is steep and even if they wanted to try, Tubbo would have no idea where to start. They’re not exactly the most fit, or strong enough to haul each other up there without attracting the attention of wandering monsters. Plus, then they’d be stuck up there without any supplies. So they stick to the inside of the store and the office instead, and Tommy occasionally pops his head out into the street to look for anything new.

It’s all the same, mostly. The power grid is definitely out-- the streetlamps don’t come on at night anymore and the Tesco is silent. The rest of the refrigerated items go bad and Tubbo takes to wearing a fabric around his nose and mouth when they go out, since the smell is pretty awful. They start to acclimate and Tubbo reasons with Tommy on day two to go to sleep when the sun sets and keep the batteries on low usage.

“We don’t know how long they’ll last,” he points out, and Tommy grudgingly has to agree. So they start to rise and sleep with the sun. It’s a good system, really, and Tommy honestly sleeps better than he has since this whole thing started. He feels.. Safe, tucked away in their metal box filled with food and supplies. He feels prepared. Watermelon noises and dead people haunt his dreams, yes, but when he’s awake he feels safe and that is the most important thing.

It’s five days into their stay at Tesco’s when they finally see other people.

“Tommy,” Tubbo hisses one morning, shaking him awake from dreamless sleep. It’s dark in the room but the lantern’s on and casting shadows onto Tubbo’s worried face. “Someone’s outside.”

“Let ‘em go away, then,” Tommy says drowsily, because he’s tired and thinking Tubbo’s talking about someone dead. More often than not the dead shuffle in and out of the store, searching and looking and occasionally scraping or banging on things, moving things around. It’s noise, but it’s noise they’re familiar with.

“No,” Tubbo insists, shaking him again. “It’s someone alive.”

That wakes him right up, and Tommy sits up, narrowly avoiding whacking Tubbo’s forehead with his own. They’re silent, and Tommy listens.

Outside, things shuffle. They both creep to the door and press their ears against it, listening hard.

“I heard someone messing with the shelves,” Tubbo says gently. “And then voices. Just one.”

“There might be others,” Tommy says, and reaches for the doorknob. Tubbo’s fingers wrap around his wrist before he reaches it, gripping tight.

“Wait!” He says. “Wait, just... get the bat. And hammer.” The *just in case* is left unsaid, but Tommy knows the look when he sees it. He shifts away from the door, to the corner where they kept anything not edible, and snags the bat. It’s heavy wood in his hands, a formidable weapon (just in case) to be used against those meaning harm.

Tubbo’s still got his ear pressed against the door when Tommy crawls back, holding it in his lap as they sit there.

“Hear anything?” Tommy whispers, and Tubbo shakes his head.

Like something straight out of a horror movie, the doorknob rattles and shakes as someone on the other side fights to get in. Both boys jump backwards, fear shooting straight through Tommy’s heart as they scramble away and the door shakes, and shakes, and shakes. The bat is raised, and Tubbo’s behind him as Tommy stares at the door.

“On three,” Tommy whispers, and Tubbo’s hands clench the hammer. They’d traded weapons. Tommy’s alright with that for now. “One, two--”

On three, he reaches out and unlocks the door.

Chapter End Notes

so, babies killed their first zombos. and now they have trauma. look what i did, i took two perfectly fine children and gave them trauma.

this is getting a little long for my liking, but hey! it's a story. i'll probably put off posting the last chapter of this until a bit later >:) because i'm evil and want the reveal to be in the sequel that i've yet to post.

if you enjoy this story, make sure you've read the mother fic, [the little children raise their open filthy palms](#)! and if you like my work, feel free to check out my profile and read the other stuff i've got

thanks for the read! comments and kudos appreciated!!!! <3

-

find me on [twitter](#) and [tumblr](#)!

i also now have a [discord](#) if you're interested!

something good

Chapter Notes

it's been a long time coming.

enjoy :)

(this was beta'd by the lovely Kitsune_kenma !)

Nothing happens for a moment.

After all, whoever had been on the opposite side of the door from them had just tried the handle. It makes sense that they wouldn't try again, finding it locked. Neither of them breathe for a moment, holding entirely still and ready to either bolt or hit. Tubbo's brain flits back to the zombie he'd— well, crushed is a perfectly fine description to use in this case, but it makes him queasy, so he decides to think of it as disposed of instead. His brain flits back to that zombie and how he'd hit it, the softest parts of the head. How the temples had caved. How the brain had spilled like grey eggy pudding—

It's disturbingly easy to swallow back bile as he pushes it out of his mind.

He shifts a bit, waiting, and then there are footsteps. Leading away from the door, back out across the linoleum, and fading slightly as they go. Neither boy moves. Neither of them can, Tubbo thinks, since Tommy's sitting just as stiff as he is.

"That was so stupid," Tommy whispers after a moment, reaching out, gently locking the door once more.

His fingertips are shaking.

"Why did I do that?"

"Shh," Tubbo mumbles, breaking their formation in order to crawl up to the door, pressing his ear to it.

The store outside is silent now, the only thing he's able to hear the ragged edges of their own breathing. Tommy's chest heaves, and Tubbo knows he's in a similar boat.

"Anything?" Tommy asks, and like Tubbo, his voice is barely above a whisper.

Tubbo shakes his head, leaning back on his heels, and then slowly sinking backwards and backwards until he's falling against Tommy. Tommy, who says nothing and just brings his arms up over Tubbo's shoulders and buries his face into his hair.

“Why did I unlock the door?” Tommy breathes a minute or thirty later, when both of their hands have stopped shaking. “What if they burst in? Had a gun?”

“They wouldn’t have been expecting us,” Tubbo reasons quietly, eyes closed.

Despite it, he can still see the soft glow of their lantern from behind his eyelids.

“We could’ve thrown them off balance, if they meant to hurt us. Stuff like that. Besides, where would they even get a gun?”

“Fuck this,” Tommy grumbles, and his face is tugging out of Tubbo’s hair and he’s shifting and Tubbo reluctantly moves away.

He stretches his fingers out, dropping the hammer he hadn’t realized he was still holding.

“Fuck what?” Tubbo asks, tipping his head and stretching his hands out again.

“I’m so fucking tired of being cramped in here,” Tommy says, and he’s getting up, he’s pacing the small floor. “We just sit here and wait. Pansies. Waiting for something to happen and when it does—” His hand flails towards the door, a scowl on his face. “—we chicken out!”

“We didn’t chicken out,” Tubbo reasons, watching Tommy pace from right to left, then left to right, then back again.

A paper crinkles under his feet.

“We just... didn’t do anything.”

“Right, but someone was out there,” Tommy insists, hands flailing again. “We can’t just sit here until we run out of food. Like the basement. We’ll just— we’ll die! We’ll get bit, or something will go wrong, and we’ll die! Or I’ll die, or you will, and then the other one will be left alone—”

Tubbo’s shoulder aches. He doesn’t say it out loud, but they both know that Tubbo is the one who will be left alone if something goes wrong. He doesn’t want to be left alone. The thought terrifies him. It scares him enough that he stays silent as Tommy rants.

“We need to start packing shit up,” Tommy reasons out loud, staring at their pile of supplies. “Get it into our bags and just go. Find someplace without people. Or maybe a city. Maybe find the— the military, or something, maybe they can help. They have to help. We’re just kids.”

“Tommy.”

Tubbo’s throat is dry.

“They can’t turn us away. We’re kids. You can pull the fucking— the puppy dog face, with the pout, and I can be intimidating if I have to. And you’re immune. Immune! Surely they want that, right?”

“Tommy,” Tubbo gasps, “What if they want to *experiment* on me.”

“We’ll burn that bridge when we get to it,” Tommy proclaims.

Tubbo winces.

“I’m dyslexic and even I know that’s not how that one goes,” he says.

There’s a bit of terror in his gut that’s hard to verbalize to Tommy—apocalypse movies always centered around the cure, after all. And usually, the cure involved killing the people who were immune. Tubbo’s not sure if he wants to be the main character in this story. It sounds way too scary, and he doesn’t want to die—well, maybe if dying meant saving Tommy he’d do it, but still. The fear hovers in his chest, a cold, unfeeling, slithery thing. But Tommy’s giving him a weird look and reaching out, a hand in Tubbo’s hair.

“We’ll be fine, big T,” he says, in the tone that means Tommy’s making a promise, “I’ll make sure no one knows.”

It helps, a bit, and while the cold thing is still in his chest, it’s presence isn’t as piercing.

“Okay,” Tubbo says. “No one knows.”

“No one knows,” Tommy repeats. “Our secret. But we still can’t stay here.”

Tubbo looks around the back room. “I know. Let’s... pack up as much as we can.”

Tommy nods. He moves, grabbing one of their backpacks, and slowly, they start to fit as much of their scavenged things as they can.

Eventually, the bags are full. Tubbo’s rationed out medical supplies to food to drink, and Tommy’s done the same. Each of them rolls up a blanket, and Tubbo is careful to keep the monkey in the bottom of his bag, squashed flat but there.

“Don’t die,” Tommy says, standing there in the center of the room they’d called home for the past while.

He’s staring at the door—Tubbo thinks he’s saying it mostly to himself but that’s alright.

“Don’t die,” he agrees, reaching forward to link their pinkies.

Tommy smiles.

They push the door of the office open quietly.

Outside, it’s probably about noon. The sun at least is high in the sky, sending beams in through the broken front windows of the store they’d called home base for the past little bit. Tubbo quietly in his head, says goodbye. It’s served them well, kept them safe, but they need to find other people.

Other people like the *man* standing in the street just as they exit the front doors.

Tommy's the first to spot him, eyes going wide as Tubbo squints in the bright light, and then both of them are ducking down behind a car and staring at each other with wide, frightened eyes. They'd been so stupid, leaving so soon— they should've made sure the person had left, that they'd been more cautious, that they—

The—

The person doesn't come after them. Tubbo's not sure they were even seen after a minute passes, then two. Tommy tips his head up, glancing over the car, and comes back down. His hand brushes the hot metal and he hisses in pain, tugging it away as Tubbo stares. That cold thing is in his stomach again, making him want to cry. He looks up, and the person standing in the middle of the road is still there. He's not dead, definitely. He's actually got a phone in his hand, staring at the screen and the other clutching a backpack strap connected to the rest of him. He's wearing a mask and a lot of clothing, but from what Tubbo can tell he's definitely older than the both of them, brown hair, and holding an axe. Tubbo ducks back down, breathing hard, and eventually there's the sound of footsteps.

"Come on," Tommy says, nodding his head and clutching his hand to his chest.

Tubbo goes.

They just follow, for a little bit.

Tubbo insists on being sneaky once he realizes what they're doing, and hell, Tommy can be sneaky. He's good at it. They duck behind cars, behind houses, hide in bushes until the guy is so far ahead they can hardly see him anymore. It's easy with all the buildings around. The only issue is being sneaky and avoiding the dead, but even that is easy enough. As long as they're quiet, nobody seems to notice. Not even the guy.

"So here's a plan," Tubbo whispers as they're hidden behind a low garden wall. "We follow him until we find more people."

"Is that the whole plan?" Tommy asks after a moment of silence. "Did you just come up with that? Seems kind of shit."

"You're kind of shit," Tubbo shoots back, then pokes his head up above the wall for a brief moment. "He's down the road. We'll just follow until he finds a group or the military or something."

"Do you think we should just talk to him?" Tommy asks, because honestly, that's the most reasonable thing here, right? "He might be helpful--"

"No, shh," Tubbo insists. "It's like spy movies, okay? He'll want our stuff, and we'll have to hand it over, because he's bigger—"

“But there’s two of us and one of him!”

“And we’re less good at fighting! Did you see his muscles? Huge!”

“Yeah, but I could knock ‘im on the head while you distract him, we’ve got good weapons--”

“Good weapons don’t mean shit if we’re trying to be sneaky. C’mon Tommy, it’ll be easy to just follow him.”

“Hhhh,” Tommy exhales, breathing out heavily through his nose, and then scuffles in the dirt for a moment and pokes his head up above the wall.

The brick is cold against his nose. At the end of the street, the guy is staring at the street signs, glancing back and forth, and then pacing for a moment. Since he’s not moving in either direction, Tommy ducks back down.

“Fine,” he agrees. “We follow. But any funny business happens, you run out and distract and I’ll whack him good. Deal?”

“Deal,” Tubbo says, shaking his hand sternly.

With that out of the way, both boys turn back to the brick wall and scour the landscape once more for the guy they’d been following.

“Tubbo,” Tommy says a moment later. “Do you see him anywhere?”

The street in front of them is empty. Tubbo’s brow is scrunched when Tommy glances back at him, eyes frantically darting from side to side as he blinks towards the street.

“Shit,” Tubbo says.

They both vault over the top of the wall, feet hitting the ground with quiet thumps. Tommy’s doing his best to be quiet about it– Tubbo’s better at it than he is. Tubbo always won hide and seek, maybe because he was smaller and lighter or maybe because he was just naturally sneaky. Whatever the reason for it, Tommy’s glad Tubbo’s sneaky, because he sure isn’t. They end up in the spot where the man had been a moment ago, staring at street signs and tipping their heads back and forth to peer down the road– Tubbo gasps.

“There!” he whispers, ducking behind a car and Tommy’s quick to follow. They’ve got eyes on him again– his mop of brown hair is easy to spot from where they’re hiding behind the car, and the man is making his way down the street almost casually. Easily. Without a care in the world. Tommy wishes he was as casual as that, but with the world so dangerous now, he doesn’t think they can risk it.

“Let’s keep following,” he instructs Tubbo, and so they do.

They follow for nearly the whole day. Weaving around cars and avoiding houses, ducking behind fences. At one point, a dog barks in the distance and sends them both scrambling, hiding under a small garden wall on their stomachs as they press sweaty palms over their mouths and panic. But the man never calls out or sees them. He just keeps walking, pointed

in one direction. He also walks much louder than the two of them— the dead people seem to focus on him instead of Tommy and Tubbo, which makes being sneaky much easier. They can just watch as the man fights the zombies and kicks them away, cursing a couple times, and Tubbo watches with wide eyes as he decapitates a rotting old lady.

“Ew,” Tommy breathes, having shut his own eyes until the damage is done. “Gross.”

“You’re gross,” Tubbo says, not unkindly. “Come on, he’s still moving.”

The sky grows darker and darker. Eventually, they stop, the man clambering into a car and disappearing into the back of it. Tubbo and Tommy find a garden shed with a lock, and after the exhausting day they’d had, they don’t hesitate to crash and sleep. In the morning, they have one granola bar each, careful not to crinkle the paper too much, and then duck outside once more. There’s a brief fear that they’ve missed the guy— he’s gone, maybe, while they were asleep or eating and their ticket to somewhere possibly safe is gone with him. But no. Tubbo spots him getting out of a car and they resume their secret spy mission with ease.

Being sneaky doesn’t exactly get easier, though. Tommy’s always almost tripping over things— he’s glad the man is going slow down the roads because trying to follow him and stay out of sight is a pain. Tubbo’s so much better at it. Tommy’s kind of jealous again, but he doesn’t voice his opinion out loud. Neither of them talk much, not like the other days they’d traveled. Their voices would be too loud, both of them know, and then they’d be spotted. And that would suck. They’re just... hitching a ride, kind of, riding this man’s coat-tails and heading towards somewhere safe and inhabited; while there’s also the benefit of the man killing all the walking dead before the zombies can get to either Tommy or Tubbo.

For three days, there’s a quiet sort of balance between the three of them. Tommy and Tubbo play international super spy, weaving and ducking and hiding, constantly keeping the man in their sights. The man travels, blissfully unaware, Tommy gloats one night, and they seem to be heading in a more populated direction. Kind of. The towns don’t really stop— the suburbs go on forever. The walking is tiring but as long as Tommy doesn’t complain, neither does Tubbo. It’s almost safe.

Or, it’s supposed to be.

They wake up one morning and the man is gone.

“What are we supposed to do?” Tubbo asks, standing in the center of the road and peering down it either way. “I don’t see him.”

“Why’re you asking me?” Tommy bites back, just the slightest bit irritated. “I’m not psychic! I’ve got no bloody idea!”

“You don’t have to be so mean about it,” Tubbo pouts, dropping his hands from his eyes where he’d been using them as binoculars. “We lost our Guy. Our favorite Guy. Guy with a capital G. I miss him already.”

Tommy scowls, turning once more in a circle to try and spot. He’s about to open his mouth to argue back, suggest a direction— when something in the distance clangs and crashes.

They meet each other's wide gazes and take off.

By the time they get there, the man is wiping his axe clean of blood, hands gloved and mask firmly on. There are a good few dead bodies scattered around, and Tubbo presses warm and close to Tommy's side as they hide behind a car a bit away. The man is breathing hard—Tommy can see his chest heaving from here.

"Wow," Tubbo says softly. "Wow. He's not just *a* Guy, is he?"

"He's the best thing we've got," Tommy says grimly, and so the trailing begins once more.

The man is louder now. He makes more noise, he walks slower, more purposefully. Tubbo stops Tommy a few hours into the morning, and they talk behind another fence as the man chops a few heads off.

"I'm not sure about this, boss man," Tubbo whispers quietly. "He's being weird. Suspicious."

"What? No he's not, how?" Tommy says, tipping his head to peer around the fence. The man pulls his axe out of a caved-in chest. "He looks normal!"

"He's being weird," Tubbo insists. "We need to be more careful."

Tommy grumbles and whines, but hey, Tubbo insists. And it's more stressful to follow from farther behind, but Tubbo still insists. Following farther back means they have to keep a closer eye out for the Guy, and also an eye out for themselves. Because when they're this far, the Guy isn't taking care of all the dead, which leaves them—

"Tommy!" Tubbo gasps, later in the day when Tommy's hiding behind a fence and Tubbo just across a walkway behind another garden wall.

Tommy's about to scold him for being loud before he notices where Tubbo is looking— not at Tommy, but just above him. To the left. Behind.

He whirls and ducks, just in time to avoid the grasping hand of a rotting face and the stink of death. A shriek tears itself from his throat before he can stop himself, and he ducks further, slipping under the thing's elbow and stumbling forward into the yard. Tubbo is saying something— Tommy isn't hearing him, hefting the hammer in his grasp and turning, swinging wildly. The heavy top of it slams into the thing's back with a wet thump. The zombie screeches, dead eyes and arms flailing, whirling around on its uncoordinated feet in order to throw itself at Tommy again. He ducks once more— hey, he's getting kind of good at this— and brings the hammer up again, leaving a sizable dent in the thing's head.

It staggers again, for just a moment, and then to the side as a bat slams into its side. Tubbo stands there, feet spread wide and bat clutched to his chest with a wide look of terror. Tommy barely has time to react when another weapon is singing down between them, a ring of metal and wood and footsteps on the stone brick path and then—

Then there's a machete in the zombie's head, and the man they'd been following for the past two or three days is right there.

"Tommy," Tubbo squeaks, and the man is between them now, hand still on the handle of his machete as he straightens up and moves to tug the weapon from the body.

Tubbo takes the moment of struggle to dart across and slam into Tommy's chest. Tommy, who immediately steadies him and takes two hesitant steps back.

"It's alright," says the man, glancing their way. The blade is free of the body now— it squelches slightly, covered in gore, and the man leans it on the ground. "I won't hurt you."

"Fuck off," Tommy spits, Tubbo standing just in front of him with Tommy's arms around his shoulders. "Leave us alone."

"More like you need to leave me alone," says the guy. "I saw you come out of the store days ago."

"I knew he was suspicious," Tubbo whispers quietly.

Guy raises a brow.

Tubbo's mouth gapes for a few moments like a fish before he's able to push a few words out of his mouth.

"You were walking slower. Like you knew."

"I wasn't sure what to make of you," Guy says.

His voice is older but not too old and it's American maybe, with a lilt of something in it. He's looking at them with two brown eyes and his face is still covered by a mask.

"You should put something over your face," he says after a moment. "And layer up clothing. You'll be hot, but it's better than dying."

In front of him, Tubbo pulls up his shirt collar over his mouth. The guy sighs. Tommy scowls.

"Whatever," he says, and Tommy hears a mutter as he turns, "I don't need this."

And then he's back on the street, and there's another dead body in front of them but Tommy's too busy freaking out internally to be properly traumatized once again. Guy is still on the sidewalk ahead of them, the machete glinting in the sun as he hefts it over his shoulder, and Tubbo and Tommy both glance at each other for a moment.

Tubbo mouths, *did that just happen?* Tommy can only nod.

Perhaps against his better judgement, Tommy lets Tubbo drag him after the man.

It doesn't take long for him to notice.

"You're following me," he says absently, as Tubbo and Tommy walk hand-in-hand a few meters behind.

Tommy makes sure to keep their distance. Tubbo is less cautious. He holds his head up, mouth and nose covered by loose fabric they'd grabbed and tied around their faces like the man had told them to. They're not trying to hide anymore— what's the point? The man clearly knew, and Tubbo's frankly too enamoured with the fact that the man saved Tommy and helped them to think any clearer than that.

"Yeah," Tubbo says.

Tommy just grips his fingers tighter. Tubbo has to speak up more in the mask than he did before, projecting his voice and making sure the man can hear.

"We are."

"No we're not," Tommy hisses. "We're just going the same direction."

"And which direction is that?" asks the man.

"That way," Tubbo points, holding a finger out in the direction that they're walking.

The man glances back in front of them, then sighs, taking a left at the next junction they come to.

Tubbo follows, stubborn as an ox.

"This is dumb," Tommy whispers to him a few minutes later. "We should go."

"He helped us!" Tubbo whispers back, leaning in to get a good look but still keep a fair distance between them still. "He's not attacking us. He's not sick."

"I could be sick," calls the man, and Tubbo shushes him.

"I'm having a private conversation," he says loudly, because how fucking rude is it to interrupt?

"Anyways," he continues, turning back to Tommy, "he helped us. So we can just keep following and one day, we'll find more people and it'll be safe. We can find— someone. Something."

"I don't like this, big T," Tommy says, still grasping Tubbo's fingers tight.

He's kind of uncomfortable with it now, but it helps Tommy and keeps him calm so Tubbo endures. He does that a lot for Tommy, he thinks. Endures.

"He could attack us."

“We’ll run away. We’re far back.”

“Yeah, but he’s bigger than us.”

“There’s two of us. Numbers beat size.”

“Yeah, but he’s got an axe—”

“A bat works just as well. It’s aluminium, and you saw what it did to—”

“Yeah. Okay. Fine. Shut up.”

“Right, sorry.” Tubbo shuts up, if only for the moment. “We could totally take him.”

“Look at his arms,” Tommy hisses, scowling still. “They’re like. Tree trunks. We’re dead, Tubbo. So dead.”

“Not dead yet,” Tubbo reminds him. “And you promised. Don’t die. No dying.”

“I can’t hold up that promise if—”

“I’m going to keep walking,” says Guy, who’s stopped to watch them argue apparently and is now leaning on his axe once more. “If you two... scallywags are done bickering.”

Tubbo looks at Tommy. Tommy looks at Tubbo.

“We’re coming,” says Tubbo stubbornly, tugging Tommy forward by the hand and putting on his best scary face. Guy looks startled.

“What the fuck do you mean scallywags,” Tommy says, sounding confused as he’s dragged along by Tubbo and as the man hefts his weapon again to keep walking. “We’re not like, pirates or something.” Tubbo giggles at the thought— he can picture Tommy in an eyepatch now, and it’s kind of amusing.

“I don’t talk to children a lot,” the man says, hesitant, still a good distance from them. “I never really thought I would have the chance again.”

“We’re not kids,” Tommy says, acid on his tongue. Tubbo tightens his grip on his fingers. “Look at how far we’ve come! We’re not kids, so don’t act like we are.”

“Alright, alright,” the guy says, and he holds one hand in the air in surrender. Tubbo watches him carefully— any wrong moves and they’ll bolt, but even as they walk in tandem a few feet away, the guy doesn’t try to lunge at them or anything. “People, then.”

“I didn’t mind it,” Tubbo admits, watching as Tommy’s ears go red. “Pirates are cool. We used to pretend, remember? *Pirates of the Caribbean*? You’d be the captain, I’d be the first mate.”

“We’re not little kids, Tubbo, shut up.”

“Yeah, but when we were!”

“Not. Helping.”

“I like pirates too,” the man pipes up. “*Pirates of the Caribbean* was a really good movie.”

Tubbo beams, glancing up at Tommy, a bit of vindication curling in his gut as he watches his ears get redder and redder. Maybe it’s the sun or maybe it’s embarrassment, but whatever it is, it’s fun to watch.

“See?” he asks, turning to smile widely at the man in front of them.

He probably can’t see it with his mask in the way, but that’s fine. Tubbo’s an international super spy and his emotions are his own to bottle up and cap, or maybe cork, like a bottle of wine.

“He also likes pirates. Grown men like us can like pirates. I bet you were the captain when you played pirates too, right?” And then, with a curving smile, “Back when the dinosaurs were around?”

“Tubbo!” Tommy hisses, slapping his arm lightly. Ahead of them, the man’s shoulders shake.

“I was,” he eventually says, turning back to look at them with brown eyes like a bear’s. “Sometimes. We’d take turns.”

“Then we’ll also take turns being the captain,” Tubbo proclaims.

It’s a simple and childish solution to a meaningless problem— Tubbo knows he’s hiding right now, layering overt naivety over sly introspection, and he knows Tommy is paranoid right now with how he’s crushing Tubbo’s fingers between his own. In the staticy set of his shoulders, a bird perched to take flight.

“You can start, since you’re the one walking ahead of us. Due north, Captain!”

“Aye aye,” says the man, raising a hand in salute.

Tubbo returns it. Tommy grits his teeth and sighs, then raises a hand to his forehead and jerks it outwards. The man’s eyes crinkle for a moment and then he turns, face out of sight as they march forwards and towards the sunset.

Tommy’s not so sure about this.

The man they've been following knows about them now, and instead of hiding meters away they're instead trotting along behind him like puppies, sticking close instead of far. They have to be quieter now in order to avoid the zombies roaming the streets; occasionally they'll see them in the distance, shambling figures whose heads snap and crack as they turn to spot them. Traveling with someone other than just Tubbo is weird. It's downright odd. It's, dare Tommy say it, peculiar.

There are an extra set of hands around to wreck shit with, though. Tommy's been saved by this man once already— he plans not to make it a habit. Despite that plan, before the end of the first day the man has taken out approximately six of the offending monsters. Tubbo has taken out one. Tommy hasn't killed any.

It's a bit queasy, the whole thing, he reckons to himself as he picks himself back up and eyes the scratches on his palms from the gravelly pavement below them. He'd thrown himself to the side in order to get out of one's way, sending it stumbling into Tubbo's weapon, and then the Captain's. The name had stuck, apparently, and even now Tubbo's gushing to the Captain about how he'd swung the axe and if he can get some lessons because this is the new normal now and—

And—

It's all a bit queasy, innit?

Tommy brushes his hands down his pants and ignores the sharp sting of raw skin on jeans, marching over to Tubbo and grabbing his arm. He interrupts whatever conversation was just being held— fuck it, he doesn't need to wait to ask:

“Are you alright?”

Tubbo swings his head to the side a bit, glancing Tommy up and down and coming to the conclusion visibly that Tommy is alright. Only then does he answer.

“Yeah,” he says, nodding a bit. “Did you see that swing of mine? Bashed it's head right in, didn't I?”

Queasy, but Tommy's stomach isn't rolling at the gruesome scene in front of them. No, it's settling now as Tubbo links their fingers and keeps his gaze on him. Tommy. Not the strange Captain-man who's wiping off his axe with a dirty rag a foot or two away.

“Yeah,” Tommy says, glancing a bit to the side and then at Tubbo once more. The sun's setting in the distance, the sky lighting up in pink and orange and gold. “Really cool.”

“We should get going,” the Captain calls out in the brief silence that follows.

Both their heads turn towards him, and he hitches a thumb over one padded shoulder. Or maybe it's *all* muscle.

“There's a church up here we can probably rest in. Sound okay?”

In the distance, the spire rises above the treeline and Tommy squints at it– there’s a clock inlaid on the tower, and just there–

“Something’s smoking,” Tommy points out, raising a hand. The Captain’s eyes follow his finger and he goes quiet– Tubbo, however, does not.

“Oh, good!” he chirps, taking a few steps forward and dragging Tommy alongside as he does. “People! Just what we’ve been looking for! Alive ones too, I’d bet. Zombies can’t start campfires!”

“Wait,” the Captain calls out, but Tubbo keeps walking anyway. “Hey, I said wait–”

“We don’t have to listen to you,” Tubbo says in a sing-song way, and there’s a sharp flash of vindication in Tommy’s gut.

Tubbo is right. They don’t have to listen to this strange man. Stranger danger and all that. He turns, tugging down his makeshift mask in order to stick his tongue out at the Captain as they walk.

“We sure as hell don’t!” Tommy cackles, even as the man follows only a bit behind them. “We’re the captains now, bitches.”

“A ship can’t have two captains. Tommy, you’re first mate.”

“Whatever.”

Tommy glances up towards the thin trail of smoke in the sky and grins, a bit of hope flickering in his chest. But there’s not as much hope as there is relief from the jealousy that had been festering only moments ago– there, see? They don’t have to rely on this strange man to fight their battles for them. They can find other people on their own, and within the day, too! They’re good at what they do. Fuck yeah.

Fuck no.

The camp they’d stumbled into was fine. It was. It was just...

Well.

Tubbo couldn’t put his finger on it, but something felt off. The Captain had stubbornly followed them the whole way here, constantly shifting on his feet as they’d made a loud entrance into the camp, and reluctantly handed over his axe as the people in the church had stared at them and whispered among themselves. Most of them are filthy. Even filthier than Tubbo and Tommy, and that’s saying a lot. There is no one else their age, either. Tommy and

Tubbo are definitely the youngest out of the whole group— around ten people in total, when he counts. Thirteen if he piles himself, the Captain, and Tommy in.

And they all just have, as Tommy would put it, Bad Vibes. Capital B, capital V.

They'd locked the church doors behind them all. A big wooden slab was heaved through the door handles after the locks had been clicked shut, and Tommy and Tubbo had been nudged over to a place in the pews that wasn't too dirty. The Captain had been taken completely across the church— the space was wide, open. Anything they said echoed, nothing was... private.

Tubbo counts three women and seven men in the group who'd let them in the church. No one he recognizes, although that makes sense because they'd left their hometown a good few miles in the opposite direction. The people are filthy, bags under their eyes, fingernails caked in dirt and blood. They look downright scary.

The church is very big, he thinks, staring at the windows and listening to the woman who'd let them in talks beside them. He can't even remember her name.

“-rooms are in the back,” she's saying, throat raw and scratchy. Her voice pitches in the echo chamber of the worship room. “Near the kitchens. Anything in the kitchens is off-limits unless you're on food duty. Don't leave the space without telling someone. Don't go anywhere alone.”

Tommy's fingers squeeze his own and Tubbo squeezes right back.

“Yes ma'am,” he says quietly, as softly as he can manage. “Thank you for letting us in.”

“Not about to leave two kids on the street,” the woman says gruffly, before getting up and walking away.

Tommy clutches his backpack to his front with one arm, the other still holding Tubbo's. Tubbo's not the biggest fan of physical affection— but now, here, he'll make an exception.

Tommy doesn't say anything for a moment, so Tubbo lets his eyes wander. Scans the church for a second, takes in the blankets and the campfire near the pulpit and the hole in the roof that was the reason they saw the smoke in the first place. Blankets scattered across the floor, as well as random papers and some trash here or there. The carpet's stained in a few places already— one of the stained glass windows is broken and Tubbo can just start to see stars speckling the sky in the hole that's left behind. Across the room is the Captain, mask pulled down to reveal dark scruff and a kind face that's much too stern right now for Tubbo's liking. He's talking to someone, or at least, being talked to— from what he can tell, Tubbo thinks he's getting the same spiel they just got.

“Tubbo,” Tommy says quietly, and he turns his head. They lock eyes for a moment, and both of their voices lower to hush.

“Yeah?” he asks.

“Are you—”

The rest of the question peters out, but by the look on Tommy’s face, Tubbo knows exactly what he’s asking. Capital B, capital V.

“Mhm,” he says, nodding a bit. His own backpack is by his legs, and he doesn’t hesitate to hook a foot securely in the strap. “Maybe he was right.”

“Eugh,” Tommy says, rolling his eyes. “Don’t say that.”

“Shh,” Tubbo reminds him. “Remember what we talked about? Before? Our secret?”

Tommy’s face hardens a bit and his gaze flits over Tubbo’s shoulder. Clearly looking at the Captain, and then the people milling about the pews. Tubbo shrugs his shoulder a bit— the previously-injured one, the one that’s still a bit stiff, that he stretches with care. The bitten one. Tommy glances at him, then at the floor, and sighs.

“I remember,” he says. “But we’re safer with other people, Tubbo. This is what we *wanted*. This is a good thing.” It’s almost like he’s trying to convince himself too.

Across the room, the Captain’s voice rises high above the other woman’s, and Tubbo ducks his head carefully.

“We keep our eyes open,” he whispers, hiding his own voice below the Captain’s questioning tones. “Stick together.”

Tommy squeezes his hand, eyes never leaving his face. “Okay.”

will not last forever

Chapter Notes

double update bc the last chapter got WAYYY too long haha

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The next morning, Tommy wakes up with the sun. It's a beaming, bright kind of thing that sinks into his eyelids and stains them shades of pink carnation and sunrise. He's always hated waking up early. Usually it means school, clambering out of bed before the sky has gotten light and squinting into the darkness as he waits for the bus to come and pick him up. Here, he wakes up in a church, back aching from the wooden pew they'd slept on the night before. Tubbo's hand is clammy in his own, fingers still entwined from where they'd clutched each other's hands last night as they'd tried to fall asleep. The murmur of other people around them had been disconcerting— after being in silence for so long, neither of them had been able to sleep well at all.

Tommy wakes up with the sun in his eyes and crust in the corners of his vision. He wiggles his hand out from Tubbo's in order to rub it away, fists in his eyes and then the heels of his palms, scrubbing the vestiges of sleep off of his face and shaking his hands in order to be truly rid of it. He risks a glance around— other people are already up. There's a fire being tended to by the lady from earlier. A scruffy young man is coming out of the back rooms of the church, scratching aimlessly at his back. Tommy scans the room of sleeping people, and then pauses.

The space that the Captain had occupied yesterday afternoon and last night is empty.

Tommy narrows his eyes, but doesn't raise a ruckus just yet. Instead, he pushes himself off the church pew and stretches. Two hands up, then fluidly down, nearly touching his toes. He's hardly in shape. Could probably work on it.

He steps over Tubbo and makes his way to the one lit fire in the center of the room. Some pews have been moved out of the way in order to facilitate the area. He doesn't hesitate to squat by the flames, squinting into them as the woman shifts and pulls a blanket more firmly around her shoulders. The air is chilly— he can spot the beginnings of frost on the stained glass if he tries hard enough.

“Morning,” he says.

The woman grunts. There's a bucket of water that Tommy considers for a minute, then decides on just raiding Tubbo's backpack for their shared bottles a bit later. He glances back— Tubbo is still asleep, his head just visible between pews. Tommy's gaze once again lands on the spot where he'd last seen the Captain last night.

“That man,” He says quietly. Beside him, the woman turns her head and regards him with a dry, empty stare. It’s unsettling, but he presses on. “The guy we were with. Where is he?”

“He left,” She responds simply. “Early, early this morning. ‘Fore the sun even rose. Said he was looking for someone else, told us to keep an eye on you two.”

Hm. Tommy watches the fire flicker in front of them. It’s low– he can hardly feel the heat when he reaches out and splays his palms towards the coals. Around him, the church starts to shuffle to life. Despite the movement of people, the general auras of their presence, Tommy doesn’t feel safe.

He doesn’t feel right at all. It’s the opposite of what he was expecting. More people should’ve made him feel safe, and yet when he looks at the woman and her dirt-smeared face, her vacant eyes, he feels nothing but uncomfortable.

“I would’ve thought he’d at least say goodbye,” Tommy says quietly.

The woman grunts again, but offers no condolences or explanation. In the aftermath of her silence, he turns and heads back to Tubbo.

Tubbo, who’s sitting up and awake, watching Tommy walk over with a squinty, sleepy-eyed look.

“Morning,” he says.

Tommy ignores him and crouches down next to their bags. Unzipping one, he starts to count meticulously through it. Tubbo shuffles and brings his knees to his chest.

“What’s wrong?”

“Make sure you still have all your things,” Tommy says quietly. Tubbo blinks. “Something’s wrong.”

“What?”

“Something’s wrong. Make sure you have all your things.”

“Are we leaving?” Tubbo moves over, bumping his shoulder against Tommy’s and unzips the second backpack.

He starts to rummage.

“Not sure,” Tommy says quietly. “The Captain’s gone, though.”

“What?!” Tubbo startles, jerking his head up in order to glance around.

Tommy scowls– turning his head, shushing Tubbo with a finger to his lips.

“Shh,” he says, a flicker of annoyance (tinged with fear) jolting through him. “Don’t make them pay any more attention to us than they already are.”

“Why is the Captain gone?” Tubbo asks quietly. “I knew he didn’t want to come here, but I don’t think he’d just leave us, right?”

“I’m not sure,” Tommy says, re-zipping the backpack.

It’s rough under his fingers, stained with dirt and grime from their limited travels. He’s pretty sure they haven’t lost anything– even the bottle of alcohol from one of the first houses they raided is still tucked in the bottom of the bag.

“Everything’s in here.”

“Same here,” Tubbo says, nodding and re-zipping his own bag. “Tommy, I’m not sure about this–”

“Neither am I,” Tommy reassures him, hushing Tubbo once again and rubbing at his face almost in frustration.

It soothes a part of him, the pressure of his hands against his skull and the sparks he can see behind his eyelids. He sits back on the ground, the wood floor of the church warm underneath him. Tubbo at least, is quiet, watching him with no small amount of concern.

“We should find him,” Tubbo eventually says. “Ask around.”

“The lady by the fire said he was looking for someone,” Tommy tells him, lifting his face from his hands and glancing around.

A few more people are awake now, but not too many. They’re all scattered, sitting alone where they’d slept or starting to change their clothes. One man’s fist stretches high into the air– Tommy watches.

“Maybe he really did leave.”

“I don’t think he would’ve left without saying goodbye,” Tubbo says firmly.

Tommy hates that he agrees. While the Captain hadn’t been enthusiastic about them following him, mostly filling the air with exasperated sighs, he’d been slightly fond. It was easy to tell that he’d found some solace in their company, just as Tommy and Tubbo had found some comfort in his.

Tommy nods. “You’re right,” he says. “He would’ve said goodbye.”

Tubbo is watching him expectantly. “So what do we do?”

“I don’t know, Tubbo,” Tommy hisses, throwing one hand in the air. “Why’re you asking me? I don’t know what to do!”

“Well don’t get all pissy about it. I think we should snoop around.” Tubbo says matter-of-factly. Tommy gapes.

“Well if you knew what you wanted to do, why’d you ask me?” He asks. “Snooping sounds fine! Sure! Let’s snoop, put our lives in danger.”

“Our lives have been in danger,” Tubbo points out, leaning forward so close that their foreheads nearly bonk together.

His eyes are creased, forehead furrowed. His hair is getting kind of long– it hangs over his forehead so entirely that Tommy fights not to brush it away himself. His hair is getting long too. How many weeks has it been since the apocalypse rained upon them? More than a month, at least.

Distantly, Tommy realizes he hasn’t thought about his mum in a while.

Picturing her face is... harder than it should be.

As Tommy has this terrible realization, Tubbo continues: “We’re lucky we’re not dead a hundred times over. We should be. You should be, at least. We’re lucky nothing’s killed us and people have been nice enough to us. Even here. We have *no idea* what it’s like out there because we’ve been hiding to survive. If we’re going to get out of here alive, I think our best bet is with someone like the Captain. He knows. He can help. We should snoop around and find out at least where he went.”

“Okay,” Tommy says, swallowing.

“It’s better than this church,” Tubbo keeps reasoning, eyes staring at some point over Tommy’s shoulder. “I don’t think any of these people have taken showers in a while.”

“We haven’t.”

“Whatever. We should look, Tommy–”

“I said okay!”

Both of them stop. Tommy holds his breath. Tubbo lifts his head and glances around. Distantly, Tommy realizes his hands are shaking. Tubbo’s might be too– it’s hard to tell with how his vision is swimming.

“Tommy,” Tubbo says quietly, “hey. It’s okay. I’m sorry. Let’s just–”

“Let’s look,” Tommy says, pushing himself up and off the floor of the church. No one is looking at them, at least. Not even the lady over the fire, who’s eyes seem glazed over and vacant as she sits. It makes his hands shake a little bit more, but he clenches the hem of his shirt and inhales, then exhales. Tubbo is beside him. Wordlessly, Tommy scoops up his backpack and Tubbo does the same. His message is clear: if they don’t find the Captain, they’re leaving. Tommy’s already had enough of creepy people and churches where things are sad and upsetting and most of the people are too quiet. Carefully, the two of them head to the side of the church, where there’s a hallway with big open windows to the main room. From there, it’s easy to duck and weave and keep mostly out of sight as they make their way to the back rooms.

The woman had said not to come back here unless they were on food duty. Tommy doesn't really care, and he doubts Tubbo does either as they duck their heads and open the door silently, making their way into the back of the church as quickly as they can. The door shuts with a soft click, and then they're alone.

Being alone immediately relaxes Tommy. It's just him and Tubbo, Tubbo and Tommy. They've always operated like this, and it's easier than being with other people. Especially now. The lights flicker, the empty hallway stretching on before them. The floor is linoleum, white tiles reflecting the light coming in from the small window in the door. At the end of the hall is an archway, and another window to the left letting in just a little more morning light. None of the overhead fluorescents are on, and Tommy carefully steps forward.

"Think there's an exit back here?" Tubbo whispers as they creep through the hall. Posters line the walls, some torn or ripped, others faded with sun. OUR LORD AND SAVIOR, they read, and Tommy stops for a moment to scrutinize a corkboard with red stains. It's crooked on the wall and some of the papers still attached to it have footprints on them, dirt and blood.

"Dunno," he says. "But this place is giving me the creeps."

THERE IS POWER IN THE NAME OF JESUS, one poster shouts at them.

THEY HAVE RISEN, screams another.

Tommy shudders, and moves on from the strangely relevant words in order to peer around the side of the archway.

A kitchen opens up in front of him. It's big, the white tiles remaining as they blend into stainless steel countertops and plastic chairs stacked up at the back of the room. Tables lie scattered around, a few of them overturned. It's cleaner than Tommy was expecting, and there's no one in sight as the two of them creep forward. His eyes scan the kitchen and then he pauses— lifts a hand, points.

"Look," Tommy says. Across the countertop are cans of food.

He can't make out everything from here, but it looks to be vegetables and fruits and assorted others. Tubbo is the first to bounce over, holding a can up to his face and grinning.

"Ravioli!" he says with a wide grin, slinging the bag off of his shoulder and unzipping the top. "Let's get some before we—"

"What the fuck are you doing?"

The voice startles both of them— Tommy flinches so hard he whacks his hand on one of the cabinets, stumbling backwards until he's even with Tubbo. Tubbo, who immediately drops the can and zips his bag back up.

"Nothing!" Tubbo says quickly, a little too quickly. There's a man in the archway of the kitchen— his face is smeared with dirt and sweat, and there's a poorly-bandaged cut above his eyebrow. His hair is long and messy, clothing ripped. There's a machete strapped to his back.

Tubbo goes very, very still. The man is scowling, staring at them and taking in their backpacks and demeanors. After a second, Tubbo whispers: “Tommy.”

“Yeah?”

“That machete.”

Tommy looks just the slightest bit closer at it, and swallows.

“There are plenty of people with machetes now.”

“Yeah, but...”

“Alright,” Tommy says, pulling out his hammer from where he keeps it looped in his bag. The man blinks. “Where’s the guy we got here with?”

“You kids were tryin’ to steal,” the man deflects, and now he’s got the machete in his hand to match Tommy’s hammer. Tubbo inhales sharply. “You’ll see him.”

“Split up,” Tubbo whispers. “He can only follow one of us.”

And then the man charges, and the chase is on. Tommy goes left and Tubbo goes right– the man swings to follow Tommy, and that’s a relief. He’s nowhere near as fast as Tubbo is, but if they play their cards right it’ll be fine. Tubbo disappears down a side hallway off the kitchen and Tommy vaults over tables and fallen chairs, sneakers skidding against the tiles and leaving long black marks as he goes. The man is shouting something as he waves the machete– Tommy doesn’t care enough to listen (what fucking prick pulls a knife on kids?) and ducks under one swing when the man gets too close, then wheels around and slides to his knees behind the cabinets. The man follows– then ducks, as Tommy’s fingers close around a can of food and he chucks it approximately where his head had been.

“Little shit!” the man roars, and Tommy squeaks and squirms out of the way as the machete clangs against the floor.

Or, tries to. Part of it catches his arm and he bites back a shriek of pain as blood blossoms against his shirt sleeve, staining it brilliant red. The man cackles, but Tommy doesn’t stop.

“Tommy!” Tubbo shouts, leaning out of the hallway. “This way!”

Tommy prays that whatever Tubbo’s found, it’s an escape. He runs as the man rights himself, joining Tubbo in the hall and locking their fingers together as Tubbo pulls him farther down. It’s darker down this way– no windows to light up their escape, and after a second of running, Tubbo slows to a stop.

“What’s going on?” Tommy asks, and there’s a shadow in the doorway twenty feet behind them.

“Look!” Tubbo says, pointing upwards.

Tommy blinks. They don't have time for this, they have to get out and away from these whack jobs, away from the fuckers who probably killed the Captain; he looks where Tubbo is pointing, through a small window in a door he hadn't noticed a second ago with a huge lock on the outside.

It's a freezer. Water pools on the floor of it, and the shelves are empty. In the corner, the Captain leans against a wall with his arms wrapped around himself. His bag is nowhere in sight.

"That's where you'll be too," says the man, who is now right behind them.

Tommy yelps and Tubbo scrambles backwards, drawing the man's attention away from Tommy. He grins— his teeth are yellowed and one is chipped.

"Good food for the risen. Keeps 'em away. I knew you were more trouble than you were worth."

"Food?" Tubbo chirps, before Tommy can open his mouth and tell his guy what he really thinks of him. "Food for— the zombies?"

"It keeps us safe," the man says. "Keeps them at bay. Worth the sacrifice. Your old man here was asking too many questions, so he was chosen prematurely." The man looms over Tubbo, grinning still, and Tommy solidifies his grip on the hammer. "It's an honor," the man drawls.

Tommy swings.

There's a thud, and then the man collapses to the ground. Tommy stares, wide-eyed and scared, and Tubbo's chest heaves as he leans away from the prone form now on the floor. He scoots it away with his foot after a second, kicking the machete out of his hand and then leaning down to pick it up. They've made a ruckus— Tommy glances over to the doorway for the hall, and inhales, waiting.

But no one comes running in— they're still alone, even as Tubbo gets on his tip toes again in order to peer into the freezer once more. The man in on the ground, and Tommy's hand hurts like hell, and his hammer is stained red—

"He's okay," Tubbo reassures, staring down at the unconscious man on the floor. "And even if he isn't, well. He's crazy. So."

"Holy shit," Tommy whispers, letting out a big gust of air. "Holy shit. What do we do now?"

"I'm not sure. We get the Captain out, and then leave, I think. Maybe take some stuff from—" Tubbo frowns at that, fingers gripping his bag and then, after a second, he freezes.

Tommy waits. There's a glint in his eye now, one that only grows as Tubbo swings his backpack around and onto the floor. Like a seed it takes root, and after a second of rummaging Tubbo pulls out the bottle of vodka they'd shoved in there what seems like ages ago now. He grins.

Tubbo creeps forward, the bottle tucked under his arm. They've ripped a piece of a spare shirt off to use as a rag and it's already soaked— he can smell the alcohol strongly in the air. He needs to do this quickly. Someone will find out any moment now, he knows. So he does. Tubbo reaches the fireplace and kneels by it, bringing the bottle out from under his arm and holding it out. The woman sitting by the fire turns her head to look.

It registers in her eyes far, far too late. The rag stuffed into the end of the bottle is already lit— Tubbo hefts his arm back, and hears the woman scream out as he heaves the bottle as far towards the front of the church as he can.

It arcs through the room, spilling vodka the whole way, a flaming rag trailing sparks through the air.

Then it lands, and the first row of pews closest to the doors light up in holy fire.

The woman is screaming beside the fireplace— Tubbo is already running as those who haven't woken up yet begin to wake, summoned by the sounds of shouting and the flicker of fire and smoke that's taking hold of the front of the church. He bolts, legs carrying him as fast as he dares towards the back of the building. He can see Tommy waiting, and pulls up his mask as he skids into the back room and slams the door shut behind them. The lock clicks into place.

“Go go go go,” Tommy is hissing, and behind them are people shouting.

The smoke is already creeping under the door— the church is not *huge*, and there's plenty of debris giving fuel to the flames.

“Going!” Tubbo gasps, and he snags his bag as they race down the hallway, towards the kitchen and the freezer room.

Tommy struggles for a moment with the latch— Tubbo reaches in with him, and together the mechanism shifts out of place and the huge door swings inward.

Inside, the Captain lifts his head. He's got a black eye that is worse up close, but Tubbo doesn't hesitate to step forward and throw one of the man's arms over his shoulders.

“What?” He asks, staggering to his feet and letting Tubbo take some of his weight. “What's going on?”

“Come on!” Tommy shout-whispers, urging them both forward as he waits by the freezer door. Down the hall, Tubbo can hear people banging on the door and clamoring for someone to get water. “We have to go! Go! Come on!”

“What's going—”

“We can explain later!!! Time to get out!!!”

The trio make their way out of the back kitchen and down the opposite end of the hallway from the locked door. There's more smoke coming out of the cracks now, and the Captain gasps out another few questions before Tommy slaps his shoulder and he shuts up. Quickly, they find the back door and Tommy throws it open, all three of them stumbling out into the bright autumn air.

"Christ," the Captain says, glancing back over his shoulder. "What the heck is going on?"

"Bad, bad church people," Tubbo says in response to that. "Bad people."

"We made a molotov cocktail," Tommy says brightly, as they stumble away from the church and down a side street. Tubbo hopes to whatever God exists that no zombies come after them. He's not sure they'd win a fight right now. "And we saved you, like you saved us. We're even."

"We're more than even," The Captain chokes out, eyes stuck on the column of smoke rising to their rear. "I owe you, holy crap."

"Save it, boss man," Tubbo chirps, dragging him along still even though the man's got some of his motor skills back. The Captain's also a bit taller than he is— not that he cares, of course, but Tubbo is helping and the fact he's carrying the man when Tommy is right there is not very cool. "We need to get far enough away and then find someplace to sit tight for a bit. Patch you up, and other boss man over there."

"I'm fine," Tommy says, rolling his eyes and tugging his sleeve down over his arm like it'll hide the cut. "Keep walking."

"He's right," the Captain says from between the two, still clutching Tubbo's shoulders as he slowly starts to gain function of his feet once more. "We need to get far away and then we need to stop. Both of you are right, then, I guess. Keep walking. Then stop."

"Shut up," Tubbo says, but it's not without a layer of fondness. The man's mask is gone— he can see now when he glances down at him, eyes wary, face smudged with a bit of blood and soot.

They end up a mile or two away. Tommy figures the church group won't try and follow them, and they can't risk going any farther than they already have. Outrunning a zombie is usually fine— but now, they need the rest. A house presents itself and the three settle onto the floor of the main bedroom, locking the door and leaning up against various walls. Tubbo takes it upon himself to start bandaging people's wounds— Tommy's, his own, the Captain's.

"You don't have to do that," the man says, but he holds out his arm for Tubbo anyways.

"And— not like that, tighter, see. Around the— yeah."

"Learning experience," Tubbo says quietly. Outside, the sun is casting golden rays across the land. It's a wonder the Earth is still turning. One would think that once the apocalypse began,

everything would stop. The deaths of those they cared about would lead to the end of all things. The world would stop spinning on its axis.

The stars are a testament to that childish way of thinking.

Tubbo thinks he might be growing up too fast.

“There,” he says a little while later, having finished the bandages on the Captain’s leg. “All done.”

“Thank you,” he says quietly.

Outside, there’s the sound of something groaning as it crosses the street. The column of fire they’d been able to see for a while has subsided; there’s smoke still, curling into the air like a ribbon in water, but other than that they can’t see much of the church anymore at all. The bell tower, which used to rise up above the trees and hills like a beacon of white hope, is now gone. It’s their fault too. That almost makes it worse.

“Gonna tend to my wounds, nurse?” Tommy calls out.

Tubbo rolls his eyes and scoots back over to him from the window, resting his forehead against the other’s shoulder just for a moment.

“I already did, dumbass.”

“My emotional wounds. I’m traumatized now, you know.”

“Yeah, get in line.”

“Hey.” The Captain’s voice shushes them both, but when they look over from bickering, he’s smiling. “Thank you. Again. Both of you. You didn’t have to save me.”

“Yeah, well.” Tommy’s the first to speak, raising an arm over his head and scratching the back of neck. “If we hadn’t, we’d probably have been in the same situation in a week or two. Besides, we owed you. *Now* we’re even.”

“Hardly,” the Captain scoffs. “You saved my life. I owe you now— like, an immeasurable debt.”

“Stop talking like we’re playing D&D,” Tubbo says.

“What’s D&D?” Tommy asks.

Tubbo ignores him to continue, “Besides, it’s fine. It wasn’t that big of a deal.”

The Captain scours their faces. He’s really looking, eyes boring into both of their skulls. Tommy fidgets. Tubbo stares right back. Eventually, the man leans back and sighs. “How old did you two say you were again?”

“Sixteen,” Tommy says at the same time Tubbo says “Thirteen.”

“Ah.” He laughs, a thud reverberating through the walls as he leans his head back against it. “There we go. You two are pretty resourceful for your age. Clever.”

“Thanks,” Tommy says, and now his chest’s all puffed up and damn, Tubbo will never hear the end of this one. “We are pretty cool.”

“We hid,” Tubbo explains. “For a long time.”

“I see.” The Captain stretches his arms out ahead of himself, still eyeing the two of them, and then sighs again. “Well. You can sleep, if you want. Relax. I’m not going to hurt you, and I think we should hunker down for the rest of the day so no one comes looking for us. Okay?”

“Okay,” Tubbo agrees easily.

He’s exhausted, despite the sun still being in the sky. Adrenaline takes a lot out of you— his head is heavier and heavier by the moment. He lets it drop onto Tommy’s shoulder once more. Tommy, who’s watching the Captain with a look that means he’s trying to figure something out. That, or he’s holding in a huge shit. Either or.

None of them talk for a while. Tommy eventually lets his own eyes shut— Tubbo follows suit. The darkness is welcoming, and after a little more silence, sleep claims them.

Tommy doesn’t particularly want to wake up. But he will if he has to— dreams linger in the edge of his vision, black shapes dancing around the room, and the visceral pinkish-grey of a recurring nightmare haunting the tips of his fingers. He can see brains whenever he shuts his eyes now, even when he blinks.

Maybe he does want to wake up. That’d be nice, actually. Not having to deal with the horrible visions of dead people that plague him.

The Captain’s already up and around when he lifts his head up off of Tubbo’s. The man is rummaging in his backpack, muttering quietly to himself, but stops when Tommy stretches his arms out in front of him and glances over.

“Morning,” he says.

“Morning,” Tommy says in return, a bit more warily. Then he dumps Tubbo off his shoulder in order to wake him, and the morning truly begins.

It’s mostly just them getting up, rubbing sleep from their eyes, and heading back down the stairs and into the streets. The Captain beelines for... somewhere, and Tommy and Tubbo follow. They don’t ask. They don’t say anything much at all, really. They just walk.

Eventually, Tommy can’t hold it in anymore. His words are the rushing flow of water and the stupid silence around them is a dam. He breaks it easily: “Where are we going?”

Without looking back, the Captain hums. “The countryside,” he says. “Out of towns, out of anywhere too populated. Everywhere’s populated here, but... well. Just a place with less

people. Less people—”

“Less zombies,” Tubbo rationalizes. “That’s smart.”

“Plus, it's easier to find food,” the Captain says. They keep walking, and Tommy scuffs his toes in the dirt. “Do you know any survival skills?”

“I can smash your brains in,” Tommy suggests. “If it’ll help us survive.”

“Might not wanna do that, boss man.”

“Thank you, Tubbo—”

“After all the work we put in to rescue him? It’d just be more work! Annoying, truly.”

“Ah.”

Tommy laughs now, trying to keep it down as the Captain hops a low garden wall and the two follow. And then—

Then, ahead of them, a sprawling bit of woods. Trees rise up from the ground, green and lush, and for as far as he can tell, Tommy sees no rooftops. The town ends and a road stretches onwards, into the woods and through the dips and rises of the Earth. They stare for a little bit, Tubbo pulling down his mask.

“Where are you going?” The Captain asks quietly.

“London,” Tubbo says. It’s what he and Tommy had agreed upon. “Find somewhere safe.”

The Captain nods, still staring out at the trees. He opens his mouth like he has something to say, and then closes it again with a soft click. He turns, heels dug into the dirt, boots covered in mud from the remnants of the watery bottom of the freezer still. Tubbo pauses, Tommy startling just to the right of him. They stand there as the Captain looks them each over, and then turns and marches towards the woods.

Hesitantly, they follow.

“Have you ever started a fire?” he asks after a little bit of walking. He glances over his shoulder.

Tommy locks eyes with Tubbo, then glances back at the Captain, and in tandem they shake their heads.

Questions become routine.

“What’s the best place to loot in a house?” the Captain’s voice echoes out across the living room.

Tommy nudges the door to the pantry open carefully– it had been slightly ajar, but now he pushes it open with the toe of one foot and squints inside. Without lights, the house is dim even in the middle of the day. Tubbo’s the first to call out.

“The kitchen!” he says, then lowers his voice. “Cabinets and pantries! Nonperishable items!”

“Bathroom,” Tommy cuts in, wrinkling up his nose and kicking a half-empty open bag of dry dog food. It crinkles. “Medicine cabinets.”

“Both are good,” the Captain says, poking his head out from the downstairs bathroom he’d been rummaging through carefully.

Tubbo grins. Tommy rolls his eyes and continues his search, getting on his tip-toes to run his fingertips over the dusty top shelf of the pantry. Empty. Goddammit.

“But Tommy’s is closer. Bathrooms. Check showers, because you’ll find this!”

Tommy glances over, staring as the Captain brandishes two bottles toward them.

“Shaving cream?” Tubbo asks.

The Captain runs one hand over his stubble almost self-consciously, but shakes his head.

“No,” he says. “Shampoo. And soap. It’s half-empty, but better than nothing.”

“We do need soap...” Tubbo says, leaning against the wall. Tommy shuts the pantry with a bang, sidling over to him and nudging him with an elbow.

“Yeah, ‘cause you stink.”

“Hey!”

“We all stink,” the Captain says with a smile, tucking the bottles into his bag. “There’s a river in the middle of this town. We’re going to follow it down a little ways and clean up.”

Tommy whips around so quickly he thinks he might have given himself whiplash. “What.”

The river isn’t too cold. And when he says that, he means it’s freezing. Tommy physically recoils from the water at first, but walking around England isn’t the most pristine activity. Eventually, all three of them are soaking in naught but underwear, safe in the woods for this moment. Clean, too, when the Captain pulls out the shampoo. (He has to chase Tubbo down in order to get him to use it, and later snips of dirty-brown hair fall to the ground and finally Tommy can see Tubbo’s eyes again. He decides to keep his own small ponytail. He likes it.)

(He likes this).

It happens one afternoon a week or two later.

Their alliance is still new and fragile, but it's treasured. Tommy doesn't glare much anymore. Tubbo likes it when Tommy doesn't glare. Tubbo, for one, adores the Captain, although he'd never say it aloud. Instead he sings it: My Captain, my Captain, over and over until their ears bleed and their lungs ache from laughing. He sings it to the hills, to the zombies they encounter, forcing his way through the fights and leaning on the Captain when it's over with. Leaning on Tommy too, until they're a big pile of sweaty smelly grossness and then they have to get up and find a place to sleep.

Sleep is a dangerous affair in the apocalypse for two reasons in particular. One, the dead might stumble upon you. Or two, the living might find you. Tubbo's woken up screaming once or twice— Tommy has nightmares too, but the Captain is usually stoic. Sleep is wrought with as much danger as being alive is, and they know it well enough to find a good strong house or shed and some stuff to barricade the door with. Generally, they all sleep well. It's easy enough to find a good spot to nap, and if they end up in the middle of the woods (as they do more often than not— the smell of rot in towns is overwhelming now. They avoid them.) The leaves make a more than suitable pillow.

They find a cabin.

It's a small thing. A cottage, really, in traditional Tudor style, the white plaster faded in the sun and windows smashed to hell and back.

They breach the front hall to find it empty. Then the kitchen, the hallway, and the living room. The stairs are empty, the carpet ripped up. Some kind of animal, Tubbo thinks, staring at the long claw marks.

Then Tommy's screaming up above him, reeling backwards, and Tubbo sends himself flying down the stairs before they all tumble down. The Captain was just behind him, wasn't he—

Wasn't he?

The hallway is empty. Tubbo darts out into the living room as Tommy follows, a lurching, creaking corpse following. Whoever it was before— Tubbo can't tell now— must've been stuck inside, as they crash down the staircase and the smell of death and rot overtakes them both. Tubbo tugs his mask up and Tommy does the same.

The Captain is nowhere in sight.

"CAPTAIN!" Tommy screeches, dodging left as the monster aims for his left elbow.

Both of them carry weapons, of course— they'd found a hatchet that Tubbo likes to hold. The weight in his hands is comforting. Now, it just makes him feel sick. Tommy had taken the baseball bat they'd been carrying around since day one and stuck nails in it— it's a gruesome weapon, but effective. And fun to swing around. The Captain's got his own machete, knives,

and various handheld weaponry over the time they've spent traveling. He also has a gun—how he found it, Tubbo doesn't know. Ammo is a rare and precious gift, however, so mostly the Captain uses it for intimidating other alive survivors or emergencies.

The Captain is still gone, though, and Tubbo doesn't hesitate to push himself in front of Tommy and swing with his hatchet. It lands in the zombie's arm with a sickening thud, and the creature shrieks, tilting its head up to the sky and jaw flopping. Tubbo grits his teeth. It's fine. This is their life now.

And apparently, they're on their own as the monster stumbles away and Tubbo stumbles back. Tommy catches him, hands on his elbows and then spins them both sideways.

"Get out," Tommy says. "Let's just get out and leave— oh, fuck!"

The zombie has apparently heard their plan, and stumbles into the only doorway of the living room. There are smashed windows to get out of, but Tubbo doesn't want to shred his hands and knees. They stand there for a minute— the zombie, rattling breath, and the two boys.

And then it lunges again. Unsteady on its feet it hunts, eyes like dark pits. It's fingers are leathery and fleshy as it manages to grab Tubbo's arm and he pulls away again, but it's got a really good grip and raises its mouth to—

"Fuck!" Tubbo screams, as broken teeth sink into the exposed skin of his forearm. "Fuck! Fuck! Tommy!"

"Sorry!" he shouts, and there's a tinge of fear in his voice but it's more overlaid by triumph as Tommy finally stops messing around with his bat and swings it properly.

The zombie's head comes clean off the neck, vertebrae scattering across the floor like dice on a board. Some bits of tissue connect them— the body crumples, and the head comes to a stop in the doorway of the living room.

Where the Captain stands. Silent. Staring.

Something in Tubbo gives out and he crumples to his knees.

Tommy's the first to react.

"What the fuck," He says (and continues to say), scrambling forward, and Tubbo lets him grab his shoulders, grabbing at his sleeve and shirt to try and stop him from worrying too much.

His arm is still bleeding, yes, he knows, and he can *see* the way the Captain's looking at him.

Stoic, yes, but under the surface--

He levels his gun in their direction.

That, at least, stops Tommy from his panicked word vomit. Tubbo stumbles to a stop by his side.

“Why the fuck did you just leave us?” Tommy asks, ignoring the way there’s a gun pointed at both of them. “You could’ve-- you could’ve stopped it. Helped. Where did you go? Why didn’t you help?”

The Captain’s voice is deadly even when he says: “Tubbo, show me your arm.”

He doesn’t even address Tommy. Tubbo’s not sure if that’s a blessing or not, based on the way Tommy’s vibrating with anger. He quietly glances down, then turns it to show. The bite stings-- human teeth aren’t super sharp, but this one’s teeth had been shattered at some point and drawn long scrapes in his flesh. They bleed. He winces a bit, and when he looks up, the Captain’s face is devastated despite the steadiness of his hands holding the gun.

“I didn’t think--” he says, and then Tommy spits in his direction, all fury.

“You didn’t fucking think,” he agrees, and Tubbo carefully, decides to diffuse the situation.

“It’s okay,” he says, then louder. “Stop. It’s okay. Tommy, we’re alive. Captain--”

“Tubbo, I thought you’d be--”

“I’m *immune*. Look.” Tubbo pulls down his shirt over his shoulder, and quietly, the Captain’s gun falls from where he’d been holding it up at them.

Tommy’s still shaking slightly beside him, but he’s quiet at least. Probably too angry for words.

“It was supposed to be a lesson,” the Captain says, dragging his hand down his face and turning away.

“Shit lesson,” Tommy says, and Tubbo tugs his shirt back up, presses down on the bite that’s still oozing blood slightly.

Nobody moves for another second, so Tubbo sighs, then plops down on his ass and tugs off his backpack to get at the medical supplies that he’s kept tucked away since Tesco’s. Tommy stands above him still, holding the bat in his hand like he’s ready to strike, and a few feet away the Captain paces. Tubbo bandages his arm as the tension grows-- he can feel it over his head, thick, heavy, poignant.

“So whenever there’s a tight spot,” Tommy asks, “you’re just going to leave us to die? Is that it?”

“No!” The Captain turns, facing them again, shaking his head. “No, no no no, it’s just-- it’s like the questions I ask, like the-- it’s--”

“You’re not going to be here forever,” Tubbo says, staring at his arm as the realization sets in. “A lesson in how to defend ourselves.”

“I was going to come back in,” the Captain says, weak, deflated. Tubbo doesn’t have to look up at him to know his shoulders are slumped and he’s clearly relieved. “But then it all went to shit and you got--”

“Be fucking glad he’s immune,” Tommy says again, and then he drops, the adrenaline running out and now he’s just shaking from exhaustion, not anger. He leans up against Tubbo’s shoulders, running hot as hell, and Tubbo leans right back even though it’s uncomfortable.

Beyond them, the Captain stands there, staring.

“It was supposed to be a lesson,” he explains quietly, and then after a second, creeps closer. Tubbo watches, watches the way his hair hangs over his face, the way he’s almost hiding behind it. “I didn’t mean for you to get hurt. I’m sorry, Tubbo.”

“It’s okay,” Tubbo says, because really he’d already forgiven him.

He’s a little pissed, yeah, but he and Tommy made it out alright. Tommy made it out alright—that’s what’s important.

“It’s not,” the Captain insists, and Tommy grunts beside Tubbo. He sinks to his knees in front of them, setting the gun down on the ground with a clatter of metal and plastic. “I thought-- this whole time, I’ve tried to be-- distant. I thought at the end of the day I’d lose you two to something or other but now--”

“It’s been a good few weeks,” Tubbo says. “Maybe a month or two. Or three.”

The Captain nods.

They’re all silent for a moment. Tommy’s the first one to speak again.

“I’m fine, in case anyone wants to bother and ask,” he snarks, the humor weak in his voice, and Tubbo can’t help but laugh, snorting out his nose and lifting his uninjured hand to cover his mouth.

The Captain smiles despite his granite eyes, stone-cold and clearly still upset. Not with them—maybe with himself.

“You’re fine,” Tubbo says, glancing over at Tommy just to make sure. Skin unblemished, despite the fact that his face is still a little pale and he’s got blood spattered across his shirt. They’re going to need a change of clothes.

“Thanks to me.”

“Let me see your arm,” Tommy instructs, and Tubbo hands it over despite knowing his medical skills are much better than Tommy’s own. He lets Tommy look over the bandages, prod and poke until he’s satisfied. Then they’re quiet again, sitting there in the living room of this empty, abandoned house until it’s starting to get too dark for comfort. Tubbo opens his mouth to suggest they move, either upstairs or down, somewhere without windows, but the Captain beats him to it.

“My name’s Jordan,” he offers. Tommy makes a noncommittal noise. Tubbo shuts his own mouth.

Then a second later, because he can't help himself: "You know, I quite like 'the Captain' better. It's more mysterious."

The Captain's face splits into a grin, and Tubbo's smiling, and Tommy's trying really hard not to but he can still see the hints of a smile tugging at the corner of his mouth so Tubbo will take that as a win.

"I'm sorry," Jordan says, and Tubbo giggles, then Tommy's laughing, and then they're all laughing, sitting together on the floor and pressing hands to each other's mouths and insisting on "shhh" and then bursting into giggles again.

It's infectious, more so than the literal plague they're living through, and Tubbo lets out the nervous energy he's been bottling up all day through them. By the time they're done, wheezing out breaths, the stars are out and it's getting harder and harder to see in the dark.

Jordan— The Captain, as Tubbo insists— tells them to set up on the couch, and he takes the floor, sitting up. They do so, Tommy clinging to Tubbo's side despite the couch being plenty big for the both of them, and night settles with them pressed together and the Captain sitting up at their feet and staring out at the window, at the door.

He lets the soft lull of his breathing take him to sleep.

The seasons meld together like thick pudding, spring into summer, with its hot air and smell of death. Summer into autumn, leaves falling in piles and plants retaking the roadways. Autumn into winter. They raid a clothing store, and trace mittened hands over a map. The snow doesn't come thick and deep yet— traveling through slush is easy, but messy.

They reach the end goal as the snow starts to melt.

In the distance, London looks... normal. Well, there are a few things off about it. First are the empty roadways. Second are the occasional trails of smoke in the air, and third is the smell of death and decay that has plagued them since the start of their journey.

The Captain stands in front of them, but Tommy and Tubbo soon catch up. Then, because they can, they scramble on top of an abandoned car for a better view.

"Wow," Tubbo says. "It's so... quiet."

Other than the sound of distant car alarms going off, nothing can be heard. It's the quietest Tommy's ever seen coming from a city so large.

"You think there are people in there?" Tubbo asks, tipping his head down to look at the Captain, who glances up at them.

Then the car is creaking and shifting as he climbs up next to them, holding a hand over his eyes to block out the cold midday sun.

“Damn,” he says. “Well. At least it’s not on fire. That’d be a sight to see.”

(In the future, they will stand together in this same formation, ash on the wind and smoke kissing their lips. He will look over at them both and smile under his goggles and mask, and say, “Damn, what a sight to see, huh?” But it is not the future. Not yet.)

Tubbo nods, and Tommy bumps their shoulders together.

“Do you see anything?” Tubbo asks, and the Captain lowers his hands, shakes his head.

“Nothing,” he says. “Just cars, and empty roadway. Be careful as we walk, okay? There’s spots for things to hide.”

“Right,” Tubbo says, just as Tommy says “We’re always careful!”

“Suuure,” The Captain says with a laugh.

Ever since the incident a few months ago (the one where Tubbo had gotten another scar to add to their combined collection, the one where they learned the Captain’s name and subsequently didn’t talk about it) he’d been a little more lenient towards them both. A silent apology. And, they’d change course to head straight for London. The Captain had explained to them in no uncertain terms that he thought it was a bad idea, but Tommy and Tubbo had insisted. They knew someone had to be there– the military at least. Someone, something. Maybe even family. Clinging onto hope, the Captain had said, but Tommy had staunchly ignored that.

Carefully, they slide off the roof of the car and set their feet against the tar to head towards the city proper.

Things start to heat up as they get closer.

The number of zombies they see increases. Exponentially. Tubbo hadn’t ever had an education above certain level maths, but he knows how to fucking count and that’s really all he needs. He stops counting after 150. It’s just too many zombies– none of which they fight. Instead, they sneak. Slow, careful footsteps. Heel to toe over smashed glass and past the rotted-out hollow corpses of zombies or people long-gone. Some of them have been reclaimed– flowers poking out of eye sockets, vines and plant life springing up through rib cages. Tubbo pauses at a skull grown over with moss at one point, wishing he had a camera. It’s morbid, but fascinating. It almost looks fake, like something out of a movie.

If this was a movie, he thinks to himself, staring up at the tall buildings of the city, then I hope this is the end of it all.

He's expecting something. A sign, maybe. Graffiti to prove that there were other people here after the initial wave, painted invitations to a safe place where they can rest. Maybe get the rest of that education that was halted. But there's nothing. Nothing to indicate a safe place, anyways. The Captain stops them at some point, when they're still in a suburb, and barricades them all in a kitchen. There's dead plants above the sink, by the window, and Tubbo lets his fingers drag along the crinkled leaves. A trail of green rises from the plant on the wall, and he follows it with his eyes as Tommy and the Captain argue behind him. It spreads to the ceiling, and Tubbo tips his head back to study the shape of the mold. Or is it moss? Whatever it is, it's green. Everything seems to be green now. Grass growing up from cracks in the cement, on trees, even on some of the zombies they'd seen. As the snow had melted, spring really had taken root.

"—not a smart idea," the Captain is saying when Tubbo tunes back in. "I just think we're better off skirting the actual center of London."

"We could take the metro," Tommy points out. "There are stops we could enter through."

"Absolutely not." The Captain's voice is firm, but not mean. "I'm not getting stuck down there with only a few points of entry and exits."

"What about roofs?" Tubbo cuts in. Both of their heads swivel towards him, and Tubbo hitches a thumb upwards towards the ceiling. "The houses are close enough together that it'll be easy to jump from building to building. And we'll be safer. I don't think zombies can make the jumps."

Tommy claps a hand on Tubbo's shoulder with a wide grin. "Dude. Yes."

"It'd be a risk," the Captain says. Tubbo shrugs.

"Everything's a risk," he points out. "Besides. I don't think..." He trails off, glancing upwards again at the green spread across the ceiling. He hums.

Tubbo doesn't want to say it out loud, but he doesn't think anyone is still in the city. Not anymore. Maybe at one point they had been—he'd seen one or two military vehicles as they'd crept in through backyards and houses, but they'd been abandoned long enough for grass to grow around the tires.

Maybe he's a cynic, but he thinks nowhere is safe anymore.

Tommy's face falls a little. He glances back at them, and shrugs.

"Just an idea," he says, and then zones out as Tommy and the Captain start to argue once more about methods of travel.

He opens one of the cabinets— only to find it full of the green mold or moss that he'd been looking at before. Wrinkling his nose, he shuts it again, and then moves onto the next cupboard.

Safe place or not, London's good for one thing— looting.

And boy, do they loot.

They loot every house and store they stop in. While there's not a lot there, Tubbo still takes the time to check every medicine cabinet and pharmacy, every fridge and cabinet. Sometimes they find things— bags of rice that they heat up over a fire and cook with canned veggies they found in the same house. Once, a pack of bandages. Other times, they don't find anything. Most of the time they don't find anything. But they find enough that it's worth checking.

It's their seventh day in the city and a sunny day when the Captain stops them in front of a larger building. A lot of the buildings have become larger now, as they get closer and closer to the business districts. He snags Tubbo's sleeve, running a globed thumb over the hem of it, and gestures up.

"Department store," he whispers, and Tommy is already peering into the windows (a few of which are smashed). When out on ground-level streets, none of them talk at anything more than a whisper to avoid fights. "You both need new clothes."

"I like my shirt," Tubbo argues, but Tommy's already halfway inside and so they go in.

Tommy doesn't mind the department store. It's a few stories tall, a bit smashed up, and sort of gross, but that's alright. He gets a new shirt out of it, swapping it for the old one and wrapping himself up so nothing can bite him. The Captain and Tubbo do the same, and then after the business part is over, they explore a little. Clambering over fallen merchandise, looting the cash registers, throwing pound notes all over the place. Tubbo laughs silently as Tommy takes a stack of cash in his palm and sends it flying— the Captain does too, imitating him and following along behind with a hidden smile and careful hands and words. At one point, Tubbo stops, and Tommy follows along. Tubbo pokes one of the fallen mannequins, frowning a bit.

"This is weird," he says. "Look at it. It's all moldy. Everything's moldy!"

"Gross," Tommy says, kicking a hanger across the floor. It skids, and the Captain shushes them both.

"Hello," he says, waving a hand out and frowning at them. Despite the fact he's wearing a mask, both of the teens can tell he's frowning. Tommy rolls his eyes. "We haven't cleared any of this building, yet. Don't go making too much of a fuss. You're loud enough already."

"Oh, sorry," Tommy says sarcastically, voice raspy in a whisper. "I'll remember that next time I kick a tiny piece of plastic."

"Tommy," Tubbo hisses, sighing heavily. The mood drops just a tiny bit, and it leaves all three of them unsteady. "Shh."

"You shh!"

“No, you shh! You’re being loud–”

“Who’s being loud now, bitch?”

“Just–”

“Shit!”

In the midst of arguing, Tommy had backed up slowly. One arm flew out to gesture wildly– the Captain scrambles forward in a desperate attempt to stop the chain of events that was happening, but it’s too late. He knocks into a poorly-balanced mannequin, which topples over. Silently at first, but the crash as it hits the racks of empty hangers below it is deafening. Then, the rack collapses in a screech of metal and plastic, and hangers spill out over the floor with another deafening racket.

Somewhere in the back of the department store, something groans.

“We need to go,” the Captain says. “Go. Now. Up.”

“Fuck,” Tommy exhales, then a little louder. “Fuck! I’m sorry!”

“Too late to be sorry!” the Captain tells him, ushering both of them towards a stairwell and pulling out his knife. “Go up! To the roof!”

“Come on!” Tubbo says, and the groaning is getting louder. More from outside, and before they slam the stairwell door shut behind them Tommy can see things stumbling in from outside on the street as well.

The stairs are a pain– on every floor there’s something to dodge, as zombies hear their footsteps and panting and are drawn to the sounds of life. Tubbo dodges flying arms and spittle more than once, and Tommy pulls out his hammer (now nicknamed Tommy Trusty) in order to smash a few faces in on their way up. By the time they find the roof door, they’re all out of breath and bloody, and below them is a good number of the dead.

“Please don’t be locked,” the Captain prays, and the door opens with a jiggle and a slam. The zombies groan. “Thank god.”

“I’m sorry,” Tommy says again, just for good measure.

“Just go,” the Captain says, ushering them through and stepping out onto the gravel rooftop. The sun glares, but none of them take notice and the Captain makes sure to lock the door as best he can as they get out. They all rush towards the edge of the building and Tubbo leans over slightly, inhaling sharply.

“Look,” he says, pointing down. There’s a hoard of people down there, and more coming down the street. The Captain winces, and then glances back at the door they’d come out of. There’s a bang.

“They’re here,” the Captain says. “Okay. We have to jump to the next building.”

Tommy breathes in, and then out, and judges the distance.

“I’ll go first,” he says, and Tubbo nods, lips set in a firm line. It’s terrifying, staring at the gap between buildings, but this is going to be the hundredth time he’s done this so it’ll be fine. It’s routine, at this point. They just need to get out of the city and move on, hide in the woods. Coming here had been a mistake— if Tommy wasn’t so sure the Captain wasn’t already wracked with guilt about the decision, he’d have pointed it out to him.

“On three,” Tommy says, mostly for his own sake. “One, two—”

Feet, pounding across the concrete, and he shoves himself off. For a minute, he’s weightless, staring down the gap as he flies over it, and it’s freeing. He suffocates the urge to whoop, to yell, to laugh, biting down on his tongue (metaphorically) and just grinning wide instead as the wind rushes through his ears—

And then he’s landing, feet jolting hard against the other roof, fingers scrabbling against the dirt and grime. Someone’s laughing behind him as Tommy brushes himself off, scrapes the grit from his palms, and turns around.

“You look so funny!” Tubbo wheezes across the gap, backing up and securing his own pack. “Like a pinwheel!”

“Fuck off!” Tommy calls back, glancing around. The Captain snorts.

“Go, Tubbo,” he says. “I’ll be right behind you.”

“Wheeee,” Tubbo says under his breath, but still loud enough for both of them, and then he’s running and jumping, the same as Tommy. Tommy, who’s waiting right by the edge in case he needs to throw a hand out, but thankfully, Tubbo lands a good foot inside the roof and tumbles to the ground, boneless.

“You are so fuckin’ weird,” Tommy tells him as he hauls him up with a hand, and Tubbo grins, shaking the rocks out of his hair.

“Hurts less if you go limp,” he explains, and Tommy just grips his forearms tighter and glances back.

“Ready!” he calls out, watching the Captain back up, saluting at them as he does. Tommy salutes back.

The Captain checks his bag, takes a first step, then a second. Then he races towards the edge.

Sometimes, terrible things happen in slow motion. People will say it took ages for the cars to hit each other, lifetimes flashing before eyes. Tragedy strikes and the whole world pauses for those involved.

Not here. Not now.

The Captain reaches the edge, and the moment his foot touches the edge, the roof door slams open. Tommy barely has time to register the dead crawling out of it, the noise loud enough to

be a shotgun blast. It startles all of them, Tubbo hands reaching for his ears, Tommy flinching, the Captain--

The Captain twisting, a reflex, just enough to throw off his trajectory as he flies off the building, suspended in midair, and then--

Then he's gone.

He doesn't even get close enough for Tommy to try and grab his hand.

You have to rely on each other.

"Tommy," Tubbo's saying, fingers grasping his sleeve. "Tommy, we have to do something."

You have to take care of each other, no matter what.

Below them, there's groaning. Across from them too, but that's a different story altogether.

"He's alive," Tommy says. Tubbo's crying.

Stick with each other. Do what you have to in order to survive.

Protect him.

"We have to do something," Tubbo says, fingers still stuck in Tommy's sleeve. Below them, groaning. Above them, blue sky, that's slowly turning purple and pink with the oncoming night. They have to do something, and Tommy has no idea what. The mood is gone-- they're not playful anymore, not casually traveling, there are no jokes, it's just him and Tubbo and--

Carefully, with the precision of a trained tightrope walker, Tommy shifts forward and peers over the edge of the building. Below them, far, far below them, is the Captain. He's on his back, face covered in shadow as he lies on the cement of the alley, shifting slightly. There's another pained groan as he does, and his leg is twisted in a way that makes Tommy queasy at the sight of it. He's not dead, but he's not conscious, either. Tubbo is still clinging to his arm, clearly terrified of Tommy plunging off the edge to the same fate, so after a second he pulls back and grips Tubbo's hand with his own.

"We need to leave," Tommy finally decides.

"What?" Tubbo gasps, hands like iron shackles around Tommy's wrists. "We're just going to leave?"

"He's on the ground, Tubbo," Tommy hisses. He doesn't want the Captain to hear him-- realize they're abandoning him. Because they have to. They have no other choice. The Captain had nearly done the same to them, and only continued once they'd saved themselves. This can't be any different. "His leg's fucked. He might have a brain injury. He could die in a few minutes."

"No," Tubbo says, throat choked. Tommy rips his hands out of Tubbo's grasp.

“Yes,” He insists, as much as it hurts. He's got to be the brave one now, he reckons. “We have to go, Tubbo. We can't do anything without risking our own lives, and I won't let either of us die. He told us to do this. Remember? Take care of ourselves first?”

“No,” Tubbo says, but it's through tears and it's weak and Tommy can easily start to push him away, towards the other side of the building.

“We have to go.”

“No.”

“Tubbo, come on,” Tommy says, giving him a shove. “We have to go.”

Tubbo looks up at him through teary lashes, and Tommy feels a part of him crack. There's not much left of him that isn't broken, he thinks, and this hurts. It's a pain in his chest that will never go away. They're abandoning the one person that's shown them kindness, they're sentencing him to death simply because of one stupid fuckup that the Captain said wasn't either of their faults and yet feels like it is. They won't be getting an *it's okay*, and there will never be a time where the Captain will look at them both and says *it wasn't your fault. I would've helped you two until the end of the Earth*. That is something they will never get, that closure.

Tubbo blinks, a tear rolling down his cheek, and Tommy doesn't hesitate to inhale and exhale, slow. He raises a hand, wipes away the tear, smudges the dirt on Tubbo's cheek.

“We have to go north,” Tubbo says as they cross the next alleyway, clinging to each other, making their way out of the city's outskirts. “Forget this. Fuck— fuck.”

That had always been where the Captain wanted to go. North. Away from people, away from cities and towns and dangerous stunts that could get you killed. Somewhere in the woods, in the north.

The sky gets dark and the wind gets cold as the buildings shorten and lengthen, as they avoid any shuffling dead and focus on just being quiet and stealthy. The woods are a reprieve from the chaos that had been London, and after what feels like hours of walking, they stop. They sit. Tommy doesn't sleep, and he doesn't think Tubbo does either based on the way they slump together on the dirt and just stare out into the darkness.

The next day, they get up. Fingers interlocked.

“North?” Tommy asks.

Tubbo's eyes are set, dry compared to yesterday. There's an absence between them that's hard to grasp, that makes Tommy's chest tighten. There's a space ahead of them that just feels empty. He doesn't say anything, though. He just nods, and they eye the rising sun before heading off into the trees.

They're fifteen. It's the apocalypse.

They'll survive.

Chapter End Notes

thank you for reading :) these chapters have been a long time coming- almost seven months. i'm so glad to have this done (holy shit am i glad it's done) and i'm happy that people have loved this story as much as i've loved writing it.

if you enjoyed, be sure to check out my other work :) i write a lot of sbi and benchtrio, etc. and if you subscribe to me you get emails whenever i update! how cool is that!!!!!!

find me on [twitter](#) and [tumblr](#)!

i also now have a [discord](#) if you're interested! come scream at me >:)

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